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# Alice Meynell as Critic of Literature and Art

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ALICE WEYNELL  
AS CRITIC  
OF LITERATURE AND ART

BY  
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## CHAPTER I

### ALICE MEYNELL AND HER LITERARY BACKGROUND

To understand fully the work of Alice Maynell, writer and critic, it is necessary to see her in proper perspective against the back ground of her own age. The period in which she lived was indeed a complex one, yet out of the manifold activities of the last quarter of the nineteenth century certain definite trends may be discerned which left their impress upon the work of nearly every writer of the time. Although, in the last analysis, life is an individual thing, and although agreement in a prevailing philosophy will not reduce man of genius to a formula, it is nevertheless certain that no writer can remain wholly unaffected by the spirit of his times. This is especially true of Alice Maynell who, while remaining a thorough individualist, was yet keenly aware of that intellectual and artistic renaissance known as the Aesthetic movement which dominated the art and literature of the closing years of the century. For, as Holbrook Jackson points out, in spite of its many extravagances the period was essentially a renescent one, characterized "by much mental activity and a quickening of the imagination, combined with a pride of material prosperity, conquest, and imperial expansion, as well as the desire for social service and a fuller communal and personal life."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties: New York, 1923, p. 18.

In some respects this intellectual and aesthetic activity with its new emphasis on beauty, its glorification of the fine arts, and its exuberant artistic virtuosity was a reaction against the flaccid and uninspired years of the mid-century. More than one writer, among them Alice Maynell herself, openly denounced the "dowdiness" of the 1850's. The cumbersome and padded furniture of that period had found an echo in an equally inflated literature characterized by a rotundity of phrase that, for all its pomposity, still remained lax and flabby. The facile technique of the "popular" artists of the time, too, but ill-concealed the hollow nature of their inspiration. How grotesque their work appeared to those who allied themselves with the later aesthetic trends in art is shown in a typical reaction to the exhibition at the Victorian Gallery in 1891. Here in three large rooms were exhibited the art, letters, drama, and general achievements of some fifty years of Queen Victoria's reign. Alice Maynell, who may be considered as spokesman for a whole group of writers, says of this display:

The effect is that most ignominious effect of blank inadequacy which is worse than any indiscretion, injustice, or perversity of choice..... Indignation and contempt are altogether out of place before works so inconsiderable and of a vulgarity so unpretending. We need the diminutives of Italian to express our forbearance from scorn; the works of Leslie, Hayter, Wilkie, Frith, are piuttosto bruttini.....There were painters of a certain power at work in England during these fifty years.... Sir John Millais in his best time came into the very middle of the half century, and Mr. Watts had been painting during the whole of it. But not to them were the royal pictures entrusted. They would have made something of even those dowdy times....It was a boastful age, but it never boasted of Mr. Whistler's portraits nor of Sidney Debbell's poetry. It boasted of balloons, or the pathetic passages of Dickens, and

of the Exhibition of 1851.<sup>1</sup>

And summarizing her reactions to the exhibit she concludes:

The whole scheme is, broadly speaking, chiefly an act of admiration for mediocrity, and no act could more appropriately commemorate the greater part of the fifty years under consideration.<sup>2</sup>

It was against just such an art, mediocre, sentimental, and over-ornate, that the Pre-Raphaelites had rebelled with the ardour and enthusiasm of youth. It was against a snug and hypocritical social order that Ruskin had taken up the cudgels. And it was as a direct result of their concerted action that Walter Pater raised the standard of the Aesthetic movement, not only in the cloistered quietness of Oxford, but publicly, in the pages of the Fortnightly and of the Pall Mall Gazette for all the world to read.

Indeed, Walter Pater may be regarded as the leader and typical figure of that movement which dominated the intellectual life of the period. In him there culminated two separate currents of artistic influence--one French and the other English--which, mingling with and modified by his own doctrines, became the literary and artistic credo of the Aesthetes. But Pater's influence did not stop with his own immediate group, for among the many diverse and colorful personalities of the time there were few who were not affected by his theories. In order, therefore, to comprehend the full significance of the Aesthetic

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1. "The Victorian Gallery" (First Notice), Tablet, December 12, 1891.
  2. "The Victorian Gallery" (Second Notice), Tablet, December 26, 1891.

movement it is necessary not only to understand its leading doctrines, but to trace it back to both its English and its French origins.

In England the Aesthetic movement had its inception in the literary doctrines of a writer who is usually looked upon as one of the leading poets of the Romantic school---John Keats. "The religion of beauty, of l'art pour l'art," says Farmer, in his study of the development of aestheticism in England, "has had no disciple more ardent, more convinced than Keats, and it is to him that it is necessary to go back in order to understand the English origins of that movement which drew up against Victorian materialism all the youth of the closing century."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it was in Keats, more than in any other English poet, that the Pre-Raphaelites recognized the embodiment of that principle of beauty for which they were striving---Keats, whose poems, suffused with a rich medieval coloring were a direct antithesis to the flaccid and verbose literature of the mid-century. Truly, says Farmer, the part played by Keats in the development of Aestheticism was preeminent. His was the role of the precursor. Before the aesthetic doctrine was formulated, he had lived it. "Not only was his poetry a hymn to beauty," declares Farmer, "but his whole life was occupied in a passionate search for the beautiful."<sup>2</sup>

On none of the writers of the later years of the century did Keats have a greater influence than on Alice Meynell herself. In her maturer

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1. A. Farmer, Le Mouvement Esthétique et "Décadent" en Angleterre: Paris, 1931, p.4
  2. Farmer, ibid., p. 10.

years she saw much to reject in Keats--his languors, and his too great sweetness, especially in such poems as "Endymion"--but in her girlhood, just when she was beginning to discover in herself the poetic faculty, she was swept away by the sheer beauty of his imagery. "With Keats," she wrote later, recollecting that period of her life, "I celebrated a kind of wedding,"<sup>1</sup> and his influence is visible in much of her work--not in her poems, strangely enough, but in many of her descriptive essays where the vividly pictured details show that, like Keats, she was capable of realizing to the full the ecstasy of sight and sound.

It was in the glowing phrases of Keats, rich as jewels and informed with the very principle of beauty, that the Pre-Raphaelites found a counsel of perfection. In his philosophy of life, stated in various parts of his poems, but most explicitly in the opening lines of "Endymion" and in the closing lines of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," they found ready-formulated for them the central teaching of aestheticism--the doctrine of beauty as an end in itself. Then, too in Lasinio's engravings of the frescoes by early masters in the Campo Santo at Pisa, to which their attention had been attracted by the comments of Keats, they found inspiration for an art in which, by symbol and suggestion, they endeavored to return to the naive and simple beauty which had characterized the schools of painting before Raphael.

If, after some opposition, and much misunderstanding, the Pre-

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1. Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell, a Memoir, London, 1929, p. 42



Raphaelites succeeded in infusing a new spirit into the art of the nineteenth century, their influence on literature was no less important. "Rossetti," says Cazamian, "is the necessary link of communication between the two Romantic movements, one of which ebbs away after the first thirty years of the century, while the other rises again in the last three decades. To him it was given to unite them; and in his personality they are associated with the needs properly belonging to the more intellectual period which intervenes."<sup>1</sup>

With the Pre-Raphaelite movement Alice Meynell was in sympathy, at least insofar as it strove to introduce a new vitality into English art and letters, yet she was somewhat dubious as to the advisability of returning to the past for one's whole inspiration, and debated with her readers the problem of whether or not it was justifiable to consider a school which led backward instead of forward as a living modern art. "The idea and work of the past," she warned, "will not be recalled without profound traces of the double journey...and he who makes the most deliberate attempt at absolute recall, makes also the most complete, though reluctant, confession of bondage to his day."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the efforts of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were important if for no other reason than that they startled their contemporaries into a realization of the need for a revitalization of the arts. And while the role of Rossetti was important in the development of

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1. Logoula and Cazamian, History of English Literature: New York, 1931, p. 1209.
  2. A. Meynell, "Burne-Jones," Merry England, January, 1893, p. 223.

aestheticism, equally so was that of Ruskin, who, in 1851 became the self-appointed champion of the struggling Pre-Raphaelites. Believing that the materialistic tendencies of the age had blunted the perceptions of his countrymen, Ruskin endeavored to awaken in them a taste for the beautiful in life and in art. Yet his end was primarily a moral one. Never an advocate of the theory of l'art pour l'art, he protested to the end that true art consists of more than exquisite colors or beautiful words. Disclaiming the title of "prose artist" which was bestowed on him, he preferred to be known as savant or philosopher. Yet, almost in spite of himself, he prepared the way in England for the Aesthetes, some of whose principles he would have been the first to denounce as pernicious. Indeed, Ruskin's influence in awakening and stimulating the young to a perception of beauty was most potent, especially after his appointment as Slade professor of history and art at Oxford in 1869. There he drew to himself the elite of the young English students, many of whom afterwards embraced the Aesthetic cause. Pater was one of his earlier admirers, and so, later, was Oscar Wilde. John Addington Symonds, discussing the Oxford of Ruskin's day, recalls how the students were accustomed to meet in each other's rooms to read Ruskin's prose aloud, and to revel in its purple patches, "dabbling their fingers," to use Symonds' picturesque phrase, "in Ruskin's paint-box of colors." Yet these very students were little inclined to follow Ruskin on the moral level on which he placed himself perhaps too often for their taste, and for the most part they retained only that part of his teaching which was purely aesthetic.

It was at precisely this point that Alice Maynell differed most widely from the typical aesthetes. None of them could have taken greater delight than she in beauty as it was revealed to exquisitely trained senses, yet she realized how necessary was the office of the controlling intellect if beauty was to accomplish its high mission of "ennobling the personality and inspiring it with the love of gentleness and the desire for education."<sup>1</sup> It was this quality, manifest in all of her work, which perhaps first made Ruskin realize how mutual were his aims and her own. After reading one of her earliest poems he sought her acquaintance, and when, in 1875 her first volume of poems was published under the title of Preludes, he wrote to her mother, "I think the last verse of that song ('A Letter From a Girl to Her Own Old Age,') and the whole of 'San Lorenzo,' and the end of the daisy sonnet the finest things I have seen or felt in modern verse."<sup>2</sup>

But on none of his disciples was Ruskin's influence more potent than on the developing intellect of Walter Pater who, as a student at Canterbury, had read Ruskin's Modern Painters, and who from that time had become an ardent seeker after beauty in art and literature. With the publication, in 1873, of his Studies in the History of the Renaissance, Pater appeared as the chief protagonist of the Aesthetic school in England. "Pendant les vingt cinq années qui suivirent," says Rosenblatt, "c'est vers Pater et vers ce livre que se tourne le plus souvent la

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1. A. Maynell, "Reviews and Views," Merry England, May, 1884, p. 70.

2. Quoted by Viola Maynell, op. cit., p. 52.

jeune génération d'écrivains pour trouver le credo du partisan de l'art pour l'art."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the famous "Conclusion" to these studies, together with the essay on "Style," and certain chapters in Marius the Epicurean, particularly that on "Euphuism," may be said to form the literary testament of the Aesthetic school. In these works are to be found the doctrines of the supreme need for beauty in life and literature, the necessity of preoccupation with form in art, and the theory of le mot juste, in which, according to Pater, was contained the whole problem of style.

"As a critic," says Saintsbury, "Pater stands to his generation--the last generation of the nineteenth century--in a relation resembling that of Coleridge to the first, and Arnold to the latter part of the second."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, few writers of the period remained uninfluenced by him in one way or another. While they did not always agree with him, they could hardly ignore him, even when they differed from him most widely. As a result of Walter Pater's theories, says Holbrook Jackson, "there were endless discussions about 'style,' and many were of the opinion that the ultimate form of thought, its manner and word and syntax, was the thing in itself. Words for words sake was a kind of gospel."<sup>3</sup> This phase of the Aesthetic philosophy had its origin in

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1. Louise Rosenblatt, L'Idée de L'Art Pour L'Art Dans La Littérature Anglaise Pendant La Période Victorienne: Paris, 1931, p. 170.

2. George Saintsbury, History of Criticism, Vol. III: New York, 1904, p. 544.

3. Jackson, op. cit., p. 136.

France rather than in England, but it was largely through the medium of Pater's writings that the doctrine reached the English public. Since this cult of le mot juste —the precise word—had a direct influence on Alice Meynell's critical methods, it may prove helpful to trace the theory through the channels of its derivation.

Among French writers, it was undoubtedly Flaubert whose literary theories impressed themselves most forcibly upon Pater's mind, and it was chiefly as a result of Pater's efforts that Flaubert's theory of le mot juste became one of the central doctrines of fin de siècle literature. But the cult of the exact word, and the disengaged, almost impersonal search for beauty, represent in reality the culmination of a series of developments which had their beginnings, not in Flaubert, but farther back, in the writings of Gautier. As in England, the French theory of l'art pour l'art may be traced through clearly defined channels. From Pater, back through Flaubert, through Baudelaire, and finally to Gautier we must go, if we are to find the origins of that cult which worshipped art for its own sake and which sought to maintain a detached attitude toward that beauty which was the result of its search.

Like the English Aesthetic movement, the French cult of l'art pour l'art was in a sense a reaction—a reaction primarily against the exuberant romanticism of Victor Hugo. In direct antithesis to Hugo's love for the oratorical, the elaborate, and the ornate, the new school became enamoured of the precise, even the austere, in language and style. Gautier, one of the earliest of these reactionaries, was in his youth

a leading figure of the Romantic school. Perceiving, however, that an uncontrolled Romanticism might lead to disastrous results in the language, he led the way toward a more restrained style. "He compelled the torrent of romanticism," says Brunetière, "to enter again within its banks; he repaired its ravages, and while regulating the conquest, he assured its duration."<sup>1</sup>

Loving verse as he did for its "solid, strictly limited, resistant form,"<sup>2</sup> Gautier looked upon the impersonality of a work of art as the measure of its perfection. "Le poète," he said, "doit voir les choses humaines comme les verrait un dieu du haut de son Olympe, les réfléchir dans ses vagues prunelles et leur donner, avec un détachement parfait, la vie supérieure de la forme." And yet, with all his impersonality, Gautier knew, says William Barry, "all the magic of words; that some have in them, the sheen of rubies, pearls and emeralds, while others glow like a piece of phosphorus when it is chafed....Without doing violence even to French, he made his colors shine, and his syllables vibrate with a language of their own."<sup>3</sup>

Here, then, in the works of Gautier, are to be found the unmistakable beginnings of the Aesthetic school. In the Emaux et Camées, to cite the most significant of his works, we find strict emphasis laid

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1. F. Brunetière, Questions de Critique, "Théophile Gautier:" Paris, 1897 p. 196.
  2. Arthur Symonds, The Symbolist Movement in Literature: New York, 1919, p. 100.
  3. William Barry, Heralds of Revolt: London, 1904, pp. 279-280.

upon form, color, texture, and sound--all the conditions of exterior beauty. And yet, although the outward form is clearly perceived, it arouses no vague romantic emotion, but is presented dispassionately, almost with detachment, in words that like the objects themselves are brilliant, sharply defined, and with all the incisive outlines of an engraved jewel.

"L'inexprimable n'existe pas," Gautier declared, and the theory was echoed by his disciple Baudelaire, who wrote concerning the functions of language:

There is in a word, in a verb, something sacred that forbids our making out of them a mere game of chance. The skillful handling of language is the practice of a suggestive kind of sorcery. For it is thus that color speaks with deep and thrilling voice; that buildings stand up with sharp prominence on the depths of space; that the equivocal grimace of those animals and plants representative of ugliness and evil becomes articulate; that a perfume calls up its corresponding thought and recollection; that passion murmurs or roars in its ever changeless language.<sup>1</sup>

Here we find an early formulation of the theory of the word which was to play so important a part in the development of the aesthetic movement.

Le mot juste, worshiped by Flaubert and after him by Pater, was recognized not only by Baudelaire, but before him by Gautier, as having an almost sacred character, an intrinsic vitality that must not be tampered with.

This concept of the word was received and developed by Flaubert who

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1. Quoted by G. Turquet-Milnes, The Influence of Baudelaire: London, 1913 p. 119.

looked upon art in the fashion of Gautier and of the Parnassiens, as being an end in itself. Primarily occupied as he was in the effort to attain that beauty of style which would assure the success of his work, the form of literature came to assume for him an importance which equalled, if it did not surpass the value of content. The whole problem of style, as Flaubert saw it, was, according to Pater, contained in the problem of the word--the one word perfectly expressive of the thought, the object, or the emotion which the author wished to express. Gautier's theory that the inexpressible does not exist was elaborated by Flaubert:

There are no beautiful thoughts without beautiful forms, and conversely. As it is impossible to extract from a physical body the qualities which really constitute it--colour, extension, and the like--without reducing it to a hollow abstraction, in a word, without destroying it; just so, it is impossible to detach the form from the idea, for the idea only exists by virtue of the form.<sup>1</sup>

It was as a literary stylist and as a master of words that Flaubert's influence on Pater was most manifest. While still a student at Oxford, Pater had translated passages from the works of Flaubert as exercises in style. "But," says Louise Rosenblatt, "it was in the letters of Flaubert, which are perhaps the most perfect expression of soul consecrated to art for its own sake, that Pater had the revelation of a temperament similar to his own, and realized that here was a prose art resembling that which he desired for English literature."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Quoted by Pater in Appreciations: London, 1915, p. 28.
  2. Rosenblatt, op. cit., p. 197.



The perfection of literary art, declared Pater elaborating on the theories of Flaubert, depends on the exactitude with which the artist gives expression to his "vision," by finding the exact form which corresponds to the interior truth which he wishes to express. Thus Pater looked upon language as the chief medium whereby "any intellectual or spiritual power within one can actually take effect upon others, to over-awe or charm them to one's side."<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the writer of literature must be a conscious artist in the use of language, he must weigh "the precise power of every phrase and word as though it were precious metal, going back to the original and native sense of each, disentangling its later association, restoring to full significance all its wealth of latent figurative expression, reviving or replacing its outworn or tarnished images."<sup>2</sup> In short, Pater felt that the prime requisite for the effective use of language was "to reestablish the natural and direct relationship between the sensation and the term; and to restore to words their primitive power."<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of the precise word, le mot juste, was, then, one of the central features of Pater's literary creed. Following Flaubert and his precursors, Pater likewise stressed the formal aspects of art,

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1. Pater, Marius the Epicurean, p. 84.
  2. Ibid., p. 85.
  3. Ibid., p. 86.

But was the activity confined to England alone. Wales, under the leadership of Ernest Rhys, took a renewed interest in literature; in Edinburgh, Professor Gaddes inaugurated a movement which, though artistic in its inception, became in its later development a social movement with a socialistic tendency. Another Scottish movement early recognized in England was the "Kailyard School" which produced the popular dialect fiction of J. M. Barrie and Ian Maclaren. Still another of the groups destined to produce notable results in literature was the Irish Literary Movement, otherwise known as the Celtic Renaissance, with William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Russell, Douglas Hyde, and John Millington Synge as its leading figures.

London itself was the center of many such movements, not the least important of which was that which centered around the house at 47 Palace Court. Here Alice Maynell, "a veritable Egeria in the London literary world," as Richard Le Gallienne recalls, was "the center of a salon that recalled the salons of pre-Revolutionary France."<sup>1</sup> Here, to the famous Sunday night suppers came all literary London, and here, says Celia Tobin Clark, "one heard the best talk of the day, without the loss of a word, across a board as narrow as a dining table of the Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup> To the Palace Court House there came, too, in the early days, some of the outstanding figures of the Aesthetic Movement---Aubrey Beardsley carrying his inevitable portfolio of drawings; Oscar Wilde, and his brother Willie;

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1. Le Gallienne, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

2. Celia Tobin Clark, "47 Palace Court," Catholic World, November, 1934, p. 206

Lionel Johnson, "too pale and delicate even for speech;" William Watson, austere aristocrat of letters; and Richard le Gallienne, brilliant young reader for John Lane at the Bodley Head. There, too, might be found such diverse personalities as Aubrey de Vere, tall and elegant, with something of an old world courtesy in his manner; William Butler Yeats with his dreams of a Celtic Renaissance; Katherine Tynan, his young poet-friend from Ireland; E.V. Lucas, Walter de la Mare, and Wilfred Deane Slunt. Indeed the house was a kind of rendezvous for all the litterateurs of the day, and there Alice Meynell reigned not only by right of her gracious personality, but also through her acknowledged prerogative as an author whose craftsmanship was at once delicate and precise.

But although the aesthetes sought her out, and even claimed her as one of their own, Alice Meynell was not one to be indiscriminately drawn into any movement. "The hosts of the unremembered," she had observed, "are generally led by something literary called a movement," and she refused to sacrifice her individuality to what she termed "the specious safety of numbers."

Although in the technique of her art she often used methods similar to those employed by the aesthetes, she was wise enough to detect, as Paul Elmer More did later, the essential flaw in the aesthetic philosophy of life: "This exaltation of beauty above truth, and emotional grace above duty, and fine perception above action," he wrote in his study of philosophy of aestheticism, "this insinuating hedonism which would so bravely embrace the joy of the moment, forgets to stay itself on any fixed

principle outside of itself, and, forgetting this, it somehow misses the enduring joy of the world and empties life of true values."<sup>1</sup>

To this criticism Alice Meynell would have subscribed wholeheartedly. The mere surface effects of beauty were never sufficient for her artistic purposes. The aesthetes, says Chesterton "boasted that they cared more for masks than for faces, more for cosmetics than for complexions, more for enamel than for solid material; in short, more for surfaces than for substances. But when she only touched the surface she did it better; and was unconsciously classed with them as a punishment for doing perfectly what they did imperfectly. In truth, she did all that the Aesthetes did and more. The beauty of her poetry...belonged to the thoughts behind the words, and to things even deeper behind the thoughts."<sup>2</sup>

For a complete understanding of Alice Meynell's literary milieu, then, it is necessary to discover if possible what other influences, apart from aestheticism, helped to shape her individual philosophy of letters. Since the exquisite but rather vague philosophy of the aesthetes was not sufficient to satisfy fully her intellectual and artistic needs, it is not surprising to find that her most intimate literary associations were formed, not with the aesthetes, but with a smaller and more selective group who sought for the sanctions of their art in a more robust philosophy of life. This coterie, which a recent

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1. Paul Elmer More, "Walter Pater," The Drift of Romanticism: New York, 1913, p. 114.
  2. G.K. Chesterton, "Alice Meynell," Dublin Review, January, 1923, Vol. 172, p. 9

writer has called the "inner Circle" of the gatherings at the Palace Court House, contained among its members several authors who have made important contributions to the literature of the nineteenth century. Thus we find such diverse personalities as Coventry Patmore, Lionel Johnson, and Francis Thompson sharing with Alice Meynell in a common philosophy of life, and finding in the charm of her personality a source of inspiration for some of their highest art.

Coventry Patmore who, by right of his greater age and his earlier literary fame, occupied a preeminent place in the group, was definitely antagonistic to the principles--particularly the critical principles-- of the Aesthetic school. Since, in his estimation, criticism was essentially an act of judgment, he maintained, in direct contrast to Pater, that to judge requires judicial qualifications, a thing quite different from natural sensitiveness to beauty, no matter to what extent that sensitiveness may have become heightened by association with exquisite objects of nature or works of art. In his essay on "Principle in Art" he elucidates this theory:

Nothing can be more tenderly 'felt' than a school of painting which is now much in favor but, for want of knowledge and masculine principle, it has come to delight in representing ugliness and corruption in place of beauty. Venus or Hebe becomes, in its hands, nothing but a Dame aux Camélias in the last stages of moral and physical deterioration. A few Infallible, and when once uttered, self-evident principles would at once put a stop to this sort of representation among artists; and the public would soon learn to be repelled by what now most attracts them, being thenceforward guided by a critical conscience which is the condition of 'good taste.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. C. Patmore, Principle in Art: London, 1890, pp. 3-4

It follows then, to Patmore's way of thinking, that the sound critical conscience is dominated by objective truth rather than by feeling, and criticism itself "is not the expression however picturesque and glowing of the faith that is in the critic, but the rendering of sound and intelligible reasons for that faith."<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the worship of form in literature for its own sake was denounced by Patmore in his essay on "Poetical Integrity." "To a soundly trained mind," he says, "there is no surer sign of shallowness and of interior corruption than that habitual predominance of form over formative energy, of language and imagery over human significance, which has so remarkably distinguished a great deal of the most widely praised poetry of the last eighty years."<sup>2</sup>

The slightest touch of genuine humanity, he believed, had greater poetical significance than any amount of fine language that had no motivating power in sincere emotion. A discerning critic, he felt, would immediately suspect a poet of insincerity if he found that the beauty of the writer's words was obtained by labor of polish rather than by "the inward labor and true finish of passion:"

When, on the other hand, some familiarity with the poet's work has assured you that, though his speech may be unequal and sometimes inadequate, it is never false; and that he has always something to say, even when he fails in saying it; then you will not only believe in and be moved

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1. Ibid., p. 5

2. "Poetical Integrity," Principle in Art, p. 37.

by what he says well; but when the form is sometimes imperfect you will be carried over such passages, as over thin ice, by the formative power of passion or feeling which quickens the whole; although you would reject such passages with disgust were they found in the writing of a man in whose thoughts you know that the manner stands first and the matter second.<sup>1</sup>

With Patmore, then, intellectual and emotional sincerity is of prime importance. No matter how beautiful the formal aspects of literature may be, they cannot compensate for a lack of true inspiration. Beauty of form which masks shallow thinking and artificial emotion can never, in his eyes, be called great literature, and an inept technique is less to be deplored than a lack of emotional candour.

More in sympathy with the doctrines of Pater was Lionel Johnson who, even as a young man "just up from Oxford," succeeded in capturing the imagination of literary London. Unlike the aesthetes, however, he was, says Osbert Burdett, "more intellectual than imaginative, and his homesickness was for the dogma and stern thinking scholastic philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Although the casual reader often classes Johnson with the Decadents, a careful examination of his writings shows that his work bears only a superficial resemblance to theirs, for he was, as Burdett notes, "austere and restrained in mind, a noble reactionary, seeking in the intellect that return to unity which the others sought in the senses, or in mysticism, or in art."<sup>3</sup> Indeed by virtue of his sterner intellectual

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1. Ibid., pp. 60-61

2. Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period: London, 1925, p. 176.

3. Ibid., p. 137.

life, his more serious scholarship, and his actual preferences, Johnson's literary affiliations seem to be rather those of Mrs. Meynell and her circle. There the literary theories of Pater were recognized, indeed, but were transformed by a philosophy of life that refused to be concerned merely with externals, but saw in the formal aspects of art the outward signs of a profound inner meaning. To realize how true this is of Lionel Johnson, one has only to examine his theories of literature which are to be found in his various critical writings and particularly in his study of The Art of Thomas Hardy, first published in 1894. Here in a chapter called "Critical Preliminaries," Johnson elucidates his critical opinions, condemning at the very outset the decadent trend in the literature of his time:

It is a sick and haggard literature, this literature of throbbing nerves and of subtle sensations; a literature in which clearness is lost in mists that cloud the brain; and simplicity is exchanged for fantastic ingenuities. Emotions become entangled with the consciousness of them; and after-thoughts or impressions, laboured analysis or facile presentation usurp the place of that older workmanship which followed nature under the guidance of art...Literature under such auspices....must lose half its beauty by losing all its humanity; it ceases to continue the great tradition of polite, of humane letters: it becomes the private toy of its betrayers.<sup>1</sup>

Nor does he fail to assert his literary credo openly: "At the outset of these essays," he says, "I wish to declare my loyalty to the broad and high traditions of literature; to those humanities, which inform with the breath of life the labours of the servants, and the

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1. Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy: New York, 1923, pp. 2-3



achievements of the masters in that fine art."<sup>1</sup> He does not agree with theorists who maintain that the artist should be emancipated from all the claims of literary tradition and influence; neither does he side with these fundamentalists who assert that hereditary impulse, circumstantial influence, and social environment are of greater importance than individual genius in shaping the artist. Rather, he holds, the truth lies between the extremes of plenary inspiration and of mechanical necessity; and the wise critic realizes that although the artist is influenced by literary traditions, he is a man of individual genius as well. Thus it follows, he says, that "the supreme duties of the artist toward his art, as of all working men toward their work, are two in number, but of one kind; a duty of reverence, of fidelity, of understanding, toward the old, great masters; and a duty of reverence, of fidelity of understanding, toward the living age and the living artist."<sup>2</sup>

But such a principle of art, says Johnson, is often held suspect:

Extremes are just now in fashion and favor with this unfortunate result: that catholicity of taste is set down as the sign of lukewarmness and half-heartedness: he must be indifferent to the great issues at stake, the great principles involved, who can see 'much to be said on both sides.'

And discussing further the extremist tendencies of the time he notes:

There are four noisy schools, who deafen us with their controversies. There are those who preach the principle of art for art's sake; those who

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1. Ibid., p. 4

2. Ibid., p. 5

preach the principle that art is bound to preach the dogmas of Christianity; those who preach the principle that art is bound to preach the dogmas of almost everything else; and those who preach the principle that art has no principles at all.<sup>1</sup>

The function of the critic, then, he says, is to disengage from the conflict and the turmoil of life the interior virtue, the informing truth which compose the fine spirit of its age; and to do this with no pettiness of parochial pride in the achievements of its own time, but rather with an orderly power to connect what is with what has been, and to look prophetically towards what will be--"La partie immortelle et vraiment humaine survit."...

Johnson's sympathy with the critical theories of Pater is shown in the long passages which he devotes to verbal criticism, testing the art of Hardy by the standard of le mot juste. Against those who carp at criticism of this kind, Johnson cites the authority not only of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Gautier, but of older writers--Quintillian, Cicero, Ben Jonson, and Dryden, as well as Roger Ascham and Walter Savage Landor.

Yet Johnson's fundamental divergence from Pater is shown in his philosophy of life, particularly as evidenced in the final chapter on "Sincerity in Art." Here Johnson shows that the Christian philosophy toward which Pater's Marius was vaguely striving, was to him a realized thing, a positive principle of life and conduct. "He had," says Ezra Pound, "the blessed habit of knowing his own mind, and this was rare among the writers of his decade."<sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 210

2. Ezra Pound, Preface to the 1916 Edition of the Poems of Lionel Johnson.

Another writer of the period who knew his own mind in matters literary and intellectual was Francis Thompson. More directly dependent on the Maynell household than either Patmore or Johnson, Thompson found at the Palace Court House not only spiritual sustenance for his Muse, but physical sustenance as well. The story of how Wilfred Maynell rescued Francis Thompson from a life of the utmost destitution is perhaps one of the most dramatic stories of a modern literary discovery. Well-known, too, is Francis Thompson's devotion to Alice Maynell, who was the inspiration for many of his finest poems, particularly those published under the title Love in Dian's Lap. To the modern reader, Thompson's name has become almost synonymous with the rush of beauty and passion to be found in his greatest odes. For this reason perhaps, his prose, and particularly his critical prose, is not so well-known as by its intrinsic merit it deserves to be. Even to one conversant only with Thompson's poetry, however, it is apparent that he had little sympathy with the theory of art for art's sake in literature. Yet in order to understand the full implications of his literary credo, it is necessary to study his prose also. Only when the glowing testament of his poetry is supplemented by his more calmly reasoned prose works are we in possession of the complete document of his artistic principles.

Thompson's critical works, with which we are here chiefly concerned, were originally written for various English periodicals, particularly for Merry England, the Athenaeum, and the Academy. How highly his prose

regarded by the editors of these magazines is indicated by the comment of Mr. Lewis Hind, at that time editor of the Academy:

A Thompson article in the Academy gave distinction to the issue. What splendid prose it was! Reading the proofs we would declaim passages aloud for the mere joy of giving utterance to his periods. He wrote a series of articles on "Poets as Prose Writers" which must some day be recovered from the files...Here was a man who manipulated words as they (generals) manipulated men.<sup>1</sup>

As a critic of poetry Thompson shows swift perceptive insight into a craft of which he was himself a master. His keen discrimination and nice sense of distinctions, as well as his wide scholarly background, often resulted in brilliant and searching judgments. The philosophy of life which informs all his writings shows that he was no aesthete, though the fin de siècle writers who banded themselves under this title would have been glad to welcome him as one of themselves. His antagonism to the aesthetic principles is shown again and again in his essays. In "Form and Formalism" he condemns the "materialistic worship of form" so prevalent in his day, and says that in literature "form is a special object of the age's blasphemy."<sup>2</sup> Likewise he objected to an excessive searching after le mot juste:

Theoretically, of course, one ought always to try for the exact word. But practically, the habit of excessive care in word selection frequently results in loss of spontaneity; and, still worse, the habit of always taking the most ornate word, the word most removed from ordinary speech. In consequence of this, poetic diction has become latterly a kaleidoscope,

1. C.L. Hind, "Poet Journalist," Harper's Weekly: January 18, 1908, p.64

2. E. Tyman, "Francis Thompson," Living Age: Sept. 7, 1918, pp. 630-632

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1. C.L. Hind, "Poet Journalist," Harper's Weekly: January 19, 1908, p.54  
2. K. Tynan, "Francis Thompson," Living Age: Sept. 7, 1918, pp. 630-632

and one's chief curiosity is as to the precise combinations into which the pieces will be shifted.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Thompson's chief sympathies were with the older poets. Although in the Academy papers he frequently reviewed the work of contemporaries such as Sturge Moore, Alfred Hayes, Lord Alfred Douglas, Arthur Symonds, and Dora Sigerson Shorter, yet, says Everard Meynell, "a review of an Elizabethan is touched with a quicker interest than that of the weightiest in contemporary literature...He enjoyed getting at Butler's wit more than getting at Oscar Wilde's. Hudibras was a book of the moment for him, whereas The Yellow Book was not."<sup>2</sup>

Yet it would be a mistake to consider Thompson as either a conservative or a formalist in literature. He had no patience with these critics "who were forever shearing the wild tresses of poetry between rusty rules, who could never see a literary bough project beyond the trim level of its day but they must lop it with a cracked criticism, who kept indomitably planting in the defile of fame the 'established canons' that had been spiked by poet after poet."<sup>3</sup>

What he did object to was the "aspiration for a hot-house seclusion of beauty in a world which Nature has tempered by bracing gusts of ugliness."<sup>4</sup> Discussing certain affete tendencies in aestheticism he says:

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1. "Shelley," op. cit., p. 5.

2. Everard Meynell, The Life of Francis Thompson: New York, 1928, pp.206-207

3. Thompson, "The Way of Imperfection," p. 98.

4. Ibid., pp. 101-102

"Over the whole contemporary mind is the trail of this serpent perfection. It even affects the realm of color, where it begets cloying, enervating harmonies, destitute of those stimulating contrasts by which the great colorists throw into relief the general agreement of their hues. It leads in poetry to the love of miniature finish, and that in turn (because minute finish is most completely attainable in short poems) leads to the tyranny of sonnet, ballad, rondeau, triolet, and their kind."<sup>1</sup>

To achieve  vraisemblance  in literature, he believed that a certain leaven of imperfection was necessary. The slight imperfection present in even the most nobly conceived character is, he says, "its water of crystallization: expel this, and far from securing, as the artist fondly dreams, a more perfect crystal, the character falls to powder."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he maintained that an artistically modulated dissonance enhanced rather than marred the consonance of the general qualities of a work of literature.

On still another point Thompson was at variance with the literary tendencies of his day. Writers like Flaubert who attempted "to stand coldly aloof from their characters and to exhibit them with passionless countenance," were, he felt, assuming an attitude fatal to artistic illusion, for such an author's personages cannot move us because they do not move him. The reader, says Thompson, will never be convinced by an "impersonal" art, for he will believe in a novelist's characters only when

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1. Ibid., p. 98.

2. Ibid., p. 98.

the writer shows that he believes in them himself.<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see that the three writers here mentioned--Patmore, Johnson, and Thompson--refused to be drawn indiscriminately into a movement that for good or ill dominated the minds of so many artists of the time. This does not mean, of course, that they were unaware of the major literary trends of the period, still less does it mean that they remained completely uninfluenced by contemporary thought. Rather, it signifies that they exercised their right as individuals to reject that part of the prevailing philosophy to which their artistic consciences could not subscribe. But although they refused to be swept thoughtlessly into the movement, they were, nevertheless, unmistakably men of their age. That there is a distinction between the two attitudes, Alice Maynell has very wisely pointed out: "To be a man or woman of your time is not," she declares, "so paltry a thing as to be in a 'movement.' It is to accept, not to snatch, a place and a share in the inheritance of the age. It is to be historical, and not restless and discomposed."<sup>2</sup>

But if Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson found much with which to disagree in the current philosophy of their age, on one point at least they were perfectly agreed and that was in their common admiration for Alice Maynell. How highly they esteemed her literary ability is shown in their every utterance concerning her. "Her prose at its best," said

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 101-102

2. Alice Maynell, "Wares of Autolyons," Pall Mall Gazette, Dec. 6, 1895



Gaventry Patmore, "is the purest and most perfect of prose. It is the only prose that is perfectly artistic simply because it is perfectly and elaborately beautiful without ever exceeding the limits of prose."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he saw a distinct Baconian quality in her closely-knit essays: "There is," he wrote, "a Baconian depth and simplicity of wisdom, and a finality in the expression of it, which can be found nowhere else in such abundance in modern literature, and very seldom in the old; but this weight of finest wisdom is born with such grace, ease and unpretentiousness that many readers will fail at first to discern its solidity."<sup>2</sup> Of her critical ability he formed an equally high estimate. Concerning her essay on "Symmetry and Incident" he wrote, "We must go back to Goethe, Lessing, and Hegel, if we wish to discover any piece of criticism so novel, of such far-reaching importance, so moderate, so simple, so conclusive--in a word, so great."<sup>3</sup>

But such public praise was temperate compared with his more private utterances. "What Jeffrey said in the Edinburgh Review about Keats' poetry" he wrote to Wilfred Maynell, "is exactly true of your wife's prose. Jeffrey said that Keats' poetry was the test of capacity in the reader for the understanding of what poetry was. It seems to me that the faculty for discerning the merit of prose is almost, if not quite,

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1. Gaventry Patmore, "Mrs. Maynell's New Essays," The Saturday Review, June 13, 1896, p. 593.
  2. Ibid., p. 594
  3. Ibid.

as rare. Your wife's prose is the finest that was ever written, and none but kindred genius can see how great it is. I am glad to see that all the few competent judges are gradually coming to confirm all that I have said in her praise. If I were you I should go mad with pride and joy."

Small wonder that Francis Thompson, also writing to Wilfred Meynell, noted that Patmore was "all abroad" about Mrs. Meynell's prose. Yet he himself was no less enthusiastic about her writing. Indeed, it was their mutual devotion to her which had first drawn Patmore and Thompson together. "The bond between them," said Wilfred Meynell later, "was a common adoration for Alice. Thompson went to stay a week with Patmore in the country and they made friends, talking constantly of her, and afterwards corresponded, always about her."<sup>1</sup>

It was after one of these conversations--Patmore had been visiting him in Wales--that Francis Thompson wrote to Alice Meynell, "By the way, he repeated to me two or three short poems addressed to yourself. I hope there may be a series of such songs. You would then have a triple tiara indeed--crowned by yourself, by me, and highest crowned by him." With that artistry Thompson played his part in this symphony of song is shown in the exquisite poems he has addressed to her in Love in Dian's Lap. "It is the poetry of remote and ennobling love," says Viola Meynell, discussing this series of poems, "he disembodied, she almost so. It

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1. Wilfred Souwen Blunt, "How Wilfred Meynell Discovered Francis Thompson," Catholic World, Feb., 1926, reprinted from My Diaries (New York, Alfred A. Knopf.)

celebrates her spirit and his spirit's praise of her--"This soul which on  
your soul is laid, As maid's breast against breast of maid."

How greatly Thompson was dependent on Alice Maynell for inspiration  
and spiritual sustenance, he has protested again and again:

But ah! if you, my summer, should grow waste,  
With grieving skies e'er cast,  
Per such migration my poor wing was strong  
But once; it has no power to fare again  
Forth e'er the heads of men,  
Ner ether summers for its sanctuary:  
But from your mind's chilled sky  
It needs must drop, and lie with stiffened wings  
Among your soul's forlornest things;  
A speck upon your memory, alas!

He paid rich tribute to the serene beauty of her mind:

How praise the woman who but knew the spirit,  
How praise the splor of her eyes, uncaught  
While they are coloured with her varying thought?  
.....  
How should I gauge what beauty is her dote,  
Who cannot see her countenance for her soul,  
As birds see not the casement for the sky?  
And as 'tis check they prove its presence by,  
I knew not of her body till I find  
My flight barred the heaven of her mind.

No less eloquent was Thompson's appreciation of Alice Maynell as a  
literary artist. He had the greatest admiration for her prose, observing,  
however, that "her work is of that subtly delicate order which--as with  
Coleridge, for instance--needs to seek into men for a generation or two  
before it gets adequate recognition."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Quoted by E. Maynell, op. cit., p. 97.

And he is eloquent in his praise of her poetry:

The loom which mortal verse affords  
Out of weak and mortal words,  
Havest thou thy singing weed in,  
To a tune of thy fair Eden.  
Vain are all disguises! Ah,  
Heavenly incognita!  
Thy mien bewrayeth through that wrong  
The great Uranian House of Song.  
As the vintages of earth  
Taste of the sun that riped their birth,  
We know that never cadent Sun  
Thy lapped clusters throbb'd upon,  
What plumed feet the winepress trod;  
Thy wine is flavorful of God.  
Whatever singing-robe thou wear  
Has the Paradisaal air;  
And some gold feather it has kept  
Shews what Floor it lately swept!<sup>1</sup>

To the praise of Patmore and Thompson there was added the voice of George Meredith. The unsigned articles which Alice Maynell contributed weekly to the "Wares of Autolycus" column in the Pall Mall Gazette had attracted the attention of the novelist, and in June, 1895, when Meredith first addressed the Omar Khayyam Club, he inquired of the journalists there present who was the author of the Friday column. "That," he told the newspaper men, "is princely journalism." He was informed that Alice Maynell was the writer of the articles, and not long afterwards Clement Shorter called on Mrs. Maynell to tell her that Meredith had few wishes left, and one of them was "to lure her acquaintance." A meeting was arranged, and thus began what Griffin Barry calls the happiest relationship of Meredith's later life. Frequent letters passed between

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1. Francis Thompson, "To A Poet Breaking Silence."

the two, and Barry, who saw the original manuscripts in 1923 before their publication, notes how "even to the eye, the folio suggests an age already past, concentrated in two dissimilar leaders who shared its delicacy and its strength."<sup>1</sup> The letters contain frequent discussions of literary topics, and more than once Meredith pays tribute to Mrs. Maynell's critical ability: "Portia as an advocate," he says, "is not to be withstood." Indeed Meredith, at first attracted by her writings, soon fell under the sway of her no less attractive personality. He regretted that he had not known her earlier, and assured her that only she could have made him what he should have been, and what he could not be without her.<sup>2</sup> In the first months of their acquaintance he wrote, "Much have I been reading you these days, and then I must away to correction of my own books. And in truth it is as if from worship in a cathedral I were dragged away to a dancing booth."

But Meredith's generous praise was not for her eyes alone. When Mrs. Maynell's second book of essays, The Color of Life, appeared, he wrote a glowing appraisal of it in the National Review for August, 1896. Mrs. Maynell's "probed diction," he said, "has the various music and the irregular footing of prose, and if the sentences remind us passingly of the Emersonian shortness, they are not abrupt, they are smoothly sequent

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1. Griffin Barry, "Dearest Portia: The Friendship of George Meredith and Alice Maynell, Told from Meredith's Unpublished Letters," Scribner's, May, 1923, p. 515.
  2. Viola Maynell, Alice Maynell, London, 1929, p. 239.

....Her manner presents to me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and to keep the eye of a fresh mind on our tangled world."<sup>1</sup> He approved of her critical methods, noting with what sensitive perception her estimates were formed: "She examines, and gives her good reasons for pronouncing; she is no "determinate" or dogmatic; she is impressionist inasmuch as she is spiritually receptive." The essay on Duse he called "great criticism...by reason of that quiescent, passionless, but not frigid, spiritual receptivity in study from which issues the consummate representation, and the right word upon it likewise."<sup>2</sup>

But the voices of Meredith, Patmore, and Thompson were not the only ones raised in her honor. The reviews in the periodicals of the time read like a psalm of praise. "It is difficult," said the reviewer for the Pall Mall Gazette, "to praise too warmly the liberal judgment and intelligence that find utterance the most artistic on these reticent pages." And of the essays on "Eleanora Duse," and "Donkey Races," the same writer avers, "It is safe to say that no better dramatic criticism has been written in our time, and the other essays are worthy of them--the work of an observer of genius."

"You read them," said the critic of the Daily Chronicle, "with a passion of delight in their swift sweetness of rhythm and reason, their magic of gracious wisdom, their radiant and enduring ironies. We might

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1. George Meredith, "Mrs. Maynell's Two Books of Essays," National Review, August, 1896, p. 765.
  2. Ibid., p. 769.

define her book to be an excommunication of grossness, of spiritual obesity and intellectual opacity."

The adulation accorded her was such that Max Beerbohm protested laughingly that if the acclaim continued "in a few years Mrs. Meynell will have become a sort of substitute for the English Sabbath." In an article published in Tomorrow he likened her triumph to that of a queen with her retinue passing down a crowded street:

The crowd is the reading public; the mounted policeman is Mr. John Lane; the guardsmen are the literary critics; the lady is Mrs. Meynell; the homely carriage is her new book; the stalwart Highlanders are Mr. Coventry Patmore and Mr. George Meredith.<sup>1</sup>

He observes that like Minerva she has sprung in the "panoply of her wisdom full grown from the Bodley Head," while his own arrival there "at a back door" has been almost unnoticed, yet he warns his readers that Mrs. Meynell herself "must know that there are they who can do quite as much with their flutes as she with her file." And yet, "so sacred in the eyes of all London is Mrs. Meynell," he confesses, "that I knew this article will be considered nothing less than a brutal and revolting crime." "The jest," says Anne Kimball Tuell, "is good-natured; the acknowledgment all the better that it is reluctant; the challenge bears a clearer witness for its reasonableness. There could not be brighter proof of the fame

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1. Max Beerbohm, "Mrs. Meynell's Cowslip Wine," Tomorrow, September, 1895.

of Mrs. Mayne in 1896, the year of the Colour of Life and the Patmore and Meredith championship.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Mrs. Mayne wrote at a time that was particularly ready to appreciate her art. But if, like other writers of the period, she was influenced by her literary environment, one must, in a final estimate, acknowledge the fact that her work was nevertheless marked by a strong individuality. We have seen that in the literature of the time there were certain definite trends which may be simplified under three main headings:

1. The cult of le mot juste--the precise word--which may be traced from Gautier, through the works of Baudelaire and Flaubert, until it found in Walter Pater its most ardent advocate. He, in his turn, influenced a whole group of younger English writers.
2. The quest for beauty as an end in itself--an attitude which led in literature to an undue emphasis on form, and from which developed the theory of l'art pour l'art.
3. The cultivation of an impersonal attitude by the artist toward his work, an attitude which was French in its origins but which was strongly advocated by the English aesthetes.

We have noted, too, that the Mayne circle represented, in a sense, a reaction from these principles--a reaction more or less complete, depending upon the temperament and the sympathies of individuals who composed the group. First of all, Coventry Patmore repudiated the prin-

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1. A.K. Tuell, Mrs. Mayne and Her Literary Generation: N.Y., 1925, p. 42.



principles of aestheticism and stressed the importance of absolute sincerity in writing.<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Johnson, on the other hand, defended the use of le mot juste as a standard of literary criticism; yet he was aware of the essential weakness of the aesthetic program. Influenced as he was by the principles of scholasticism, his difference from the Aesthetes was mainly a difference in philosophy.

Francis Thompson was perhaps the strongest reactionary of the three. He attacked the aesthetic program on its three leading points--the doctrine of le mot juste, the pursuit of what he called an artificial or "hot-house" beauty as an end in itself, and the impersonal attitude of the artist toward his work.

As for Alice Meynell herself, she was perhaps more in sympathy with the Aesthetic movement than any of the writers just mentioned. Indeed, in an early article in the Magazine of Art she had publicly allied herself with the Aesthetes. By temperament and by training hers was a nature keenly sensitive to beauty in all its aspects. Yet it must be remembered that beauty she loved was not the artificial, slightly decadent loveliness which appealed to too many writers of her generation. Rather, the beauty she worshipped was fresh, wild, vital, quick with life; for, "much as we love beauty we love strength even more," she had written an early review for the Tablet.

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1. These theories are emphasized in Patmore's essays on "Poetical Integrity," and "Principle in Art."

How truly she was a daughter of her age, however, is shown in her definition of a classic--the fusion of word and thought.<sup>1</sup> "She did seek," says Chesterton, "as they (the Aesthetes) did, for what they called the just word, le mot juste. But she found the just word; and it was morally just as well as artistically just. It was not only an impression, but a judgment."<sup>2</sup> And on the same subject, J.C. Squire, writing for the London Mercury observes: "No writer has had a more exquisite sense of the value of words, their shades of meaning and their associative, evocative qualities. When she was satisfied she had reason to be satisfied; in her best passages no word could be improved, none could be added or subtracted without loss."<sup>3</sup> Yet sincerity was always the dominant note in her work. "She was writing," he continues, "with all the veracity of which she was capable, and using consequently all the education she possessed and every response she felt: the result was a product only to be completely understood by a public which was accustomed to fine distinctions, which could not miss her frequent allusions, and which could relish the precision of her craftsmanship."<sup>4</sup> Yet it was characteristic of her that expression always remained a means to an end. "What she wished to say," remarks Squire, "still remained the dominant thing: the instrument was an instrument to the end. Here she differed in a marked degree from some

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1. A. Maynell, "Coventry Patmore," Second Person Singular: London, 1921, p. 95.
  2. G.K. Chesterton, op. cit., pp. 8-9
  3. J.C. Squire, London Mercury, "Alice Maynell," Jan. 1923, p. 285.
  4. Ibid.

of these moderns who have set themselves to make "œuvres d'art," and who have ended by worshipping the picture, the cadence, and the word. Her style never becomes a Narcissus admiring itself in a pool."<sup>1</sup>

Yet if the artistic principles of the Aesthetes, modified, though clearly traceable, may be found in her work, the philosophy which informed her writing was unmistakably the philosophy of Patmore, of Lionel Johnson, of Francis Thompson--of that little coterie of writers who found in the house at Palace Court encouragement and inspiration for their art.

Yet to say that Alice Meynell felt the influence of certain literary trends of her day, to say that she was guided by this or that philosophy, does not, in a final estimate, explain her work or her art. Although an understanding of her literary backgrounds may help us to interpret her work, we must remember that while an author may share in the spirit of his age, and may agree with a prevailing philosophy, he does not thereby become a type nor an automaton. The true artist, much as he may be a product of his own age or of preceding ages, does not forego his own individuality, what Alice Meynell called his "essential and interior separateness."

Therefore it is to her own works that one must go for a complete understanding of Alice Meynell's distinctive contribution to the critical literature of her age. In addition to The Rhythms of Life, and The Colour of Life already mentioned, she published several later volumes of essays, among them The Spirit of Place (1898), Children of the Old Masters, (1903).

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1. Ibid.

Corra's Runaway, (1909), Hearts of Controversy, (1917), and Second Person Singular (1921). In these successive volumes it is interesting to note how the critical essay gradually predominates, until the last volume, Second Person Singular comes to consist entirely of essays of this type. Indeed, as Viola Meynell observes, "It is as a critic that she has largely to be judged in her prose."<sup>1</sup>

Yet Mrs. Meynell's republished essays represent only a small fraction of her critical work and give but scant indication of the breadth and scope of her artistic and literary interests. A careful search through the files of the various magazines to which she contributed reveals some two hundred critical essays which have never been republished and which add immeasurably to her stature as a critic.

With the critical theories revealed in these unrepublished articles, as well as with those to be found in more readily accessible volumes of her collected essays, this thesis has to deal. It shall be the purpose of the following chapters to ascertain as far as possible Alice Meynell's canons of criticism, to demonstrate her application of these principles both to art and to literature, and, finally, to present her philosophy of life as it modified her theories of art and letters, and moulded them into a consistent and unified whole.

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1. Viola Meynell, op. cit. p. 202.

## CHAPTER II

## ALICE KEYNELL'S THEORIES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

"Literature," says Alice Keynell, "is the complementary life, and there is no power of man to which it does not reach, and to which it cannot give the happiness of an ideal completion."<sup>1</sup> With so high a concept of the value of literature and of "the delicately sharp edging that a literary training gives to the natural mind," it is not surprising to find that Mrs. Keynell devoted a large portion of her matured talent to the theory and criticism of literature.

Careful examination of her entire work reveals a comprehensive body of criticism embracing many of the important aspects of literature. Moreover, some of her judgments, proceeding as they do from a mind highly trained and keenly sensitive to the more subtle implications of art, have all the inevitability of supremely right pronouncements. After her critical appraisals, the product not only of her knowledge but of her swift intuitive insight, are strikingly original, and form a definite contribution to literary criticism. Moreover, a close analysis of her work shows that her judgments were governed by clearly defined principles. Although, as Wilfred Keynell has recently stated, she never drew up for herself a formal body of critical theory,<sup>2</sup> it is nevertheless possible to trace certain recurring and consistent principles in her work. To abstract,

1. Alice Keynell, "Reviews and Views," Merry England, July, 1890, p. 267

2. Wilfred Keynell, May 30, 1935.

then, from her critical writings the underlying principles governing her decisions is the purpose of this chapter. It shall be the purpose of the following chapter to study the practical application of these principles, and to observe how flexible and far-reaching were her literary judgments.

Much of Mrs. Meynell's criticism was concerned with poetry. "To be aware of great poetry," she wrote in an unprinted article in the Pall Mall Gazette, "or of the high virtues that, like a break in Chapman's storm, 'let a great sky out of heaven,' is to be assured against a vulgar life."<sup>1</sup> The poet, she felt, was a person set apart, an artist whose genius defied analysis. If the coiners of epigrams or of phrases waste their time in attempting to sum up even a ordinary personality, she says, how much more do they squander it when their matter is a poet. "They may hardly describe him," she affirms; "nor shall any student's care, or psychologist's formula, or man-of-letters' summary, or wit's sentence define him. Definitions, because they must not be inexact or incomprehensive, sweep too wide, and the poet is not held within them; and out of the mere describer's range and capture he may escape by as many doors as there are outlets from a forest."<sup>2</sup> Yet despite this difficulty certain definite qualities may be postulated of a poet: "We predicate of a poet," she says, "a great sincerity, a great imagination, a great passion, a

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1. Alice Meynell, "Wares of Autolyous," Pall Mall Gazette, Feb. 9, 1894.
  2. Swinburne's Lyrical Poetry, Hearts of Controversy, London, 1917, p. 63.

great intellect; these are the master qualities."<sup>1</sup> To be sure not all of these attributes are to be found in every poet. The great enigma of criticism, for Alice Meynell at least, is the puzzle between a man and his gift, the delicate balance of qualities which makes one man an inspired artist and another a mere poetaster. It was the realization of this difficulty which made her critical principles so pliant and which left room for the "sudden sight," the "shock of appreciation" that lend so much vitality to her judgments.

Lyric poetry, so distinctively an expression of the modern poetical impulse, was a special object of her study. "The lyrical intellect," she writes, "is one which thinks brief (not small) complete thoughts."<sup>2</sup> It follows, then, that "the thought, the motive, the thing for which the best lyric lives, is not only a poetic thought, it is also a brief one. It closes, it is finished in shape, it holds well within the verse."<sup>3</sup> She recognizes the fact that there are both long and short thoughts which are adapted to poetry and reconciled from the beginning with the poetic intellect, yet, she notes, "A short thought which is poetic is the highest inspiration of the lyric poet...It is the brief thought that is so essentially lyrical." Yet, this brevity is not synonymous with smallness; rather, the thought is "large, great, but short."<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 55

2. "Gereef Autelyous," Pall Mall Gazette, Sept. 27, 1899.

3. "Sidney Debell" Second Person Singular, p. 36.

4. Ibid., p. 89.

The poetic form in which brevity is most consonant with amplitude of thought is, in Mrs. Maynell's estimation, the sonnet. "When a poetic short thought," she says, "is transfigured in a single beautiful image, then the sonnet is satisfied, the sonnet is fulfilled."<sup>1</sup> And in Merry England for November, 1886, we find an illuminating discussion of the ideal sonnet:

In the modern sonnet, in addition to the state and restraint of the form, we desire vitality and a certain impulse. In other words, we are most delighted with a sonnet which is an organism rather than a construction. In all definite and limited forms with parts to them--and the sonnet is the only one of many such forms that English has retained, there must be either construction or organism--the latter word implying a certain life, a spring, a unity.<sup>2</sup>

Such a sonnet, having these qualities of vitality, impulse, and movement, is, according to Mrs. Maynell, the most perfect structure that English verse has retained. She notes that other poetic forms such as the ballade, the rondel, the rondeau, the sestina, and the virelay have been more or less discarded in English verse, and the resulting freedom may have been excellent for English vigor. "But let the sonnet," she pleads, "remain as long as English letters, pure and distinct, a perfect form, vascular and alive."<sup>3</sup>

But although Mrs. Maynell realized the possibilities of the sonnet in the hands of a master, she found the Pindaric ode, when written with passion, "the most immediate of all measures." Here, she says, "the

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1. Ibid., p. 80.

2. "Aubrey De Vere", Merry England, November, 1886, p. 8.

3. Ibid.



check of the heart and the breath of elation or grief are the law of the lines. It has passed out of the gates of the garden of stanzas, and walks (not astray) in the further freedom where all is interior law."<sup>1</sup> Realizing to the full "the dignity of extension and restriction," the "touching sweetness of frequent and simple rhyme," the stirring "impetus of pulse and impulse" to be found in the greatest of the odes, she yet pointed out the besetting danger in its composition--the difficulty of technique into which the unwary poet is likely to fall. When we are sensible of a metrical check in the ode, she says, it usually occurs because to the English ear the heroic line is the unit of meter, and when two lines of various length undesignedly add together to form a heroic line, they have to be separated with something of a jerk.<sup>2</sup> Such a metrical flaw, she feels, has much the same effect "as when a sail suddenly flaps windless in the fetching about of a boat."<sup>3</sup> Yet when the ode is written with consummate skill, when to the passionate experience of poetical inspiration is added beauty of form and movement, she finds that it, more than any other poetic form, is able to express "flight, distance, mystery, and wonderful apprehension."<sup>4</sup>

Blank verse, too, she regards as a medium at once mobile, sensitive, and pliant. In the hands of such a master as Milton she finds that it is all expressive.<sup>5</sup> Milton, she feels, "is the master of those who know

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1. "Drummond of Hawthornden," Pall Mall Gazette, May 26, 1897
  2. "Coventry Patmore's Odes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 96.
  3. Ibid., p. 96.
  4. Ibid., p. 95.
  5. "Swinburne's Lyrical Poetry," Hearts of Controversy, p. 63.

how to place and displace the stress and accent of the English heroic line in epic poetry. His most majestic hand undid the mechanical bonds of the national line and made it obey the unwritten laws of his genius."<sup>1</sup> But blank verse, for Milton so sonorous and flexible a medium, became, after his time, both weak and rigid. Tennyson she regards as one of the worst offenders, especially when he makes use of what she calls the "weakest kind of work-blank verse," as he does in the "Idylls:" "His blank verse is often too easy; it cannot be said to fly for the paradoxical reason that it has no weight; it slips by, without halting or tripping indeed, but also without the friction of the movement of vitality."<sup>2</sup>

But in more recent times blank verse again became a plastic medium of expression, chiefly through the influence of Swinburne who released in it "new energies, new liberties, and new movements."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Swinburne demonstrated the diversity of effects obtainable in this verse form. When his artistic purpose required it, he wrote it "with a finely appropriate regularity" as when he described the forest glades:

That fear the faun's and know the dryad's foot.

Here, says Mrs. Keynell, "the rule is completely kept, every step of the five stepping from the unaccented place to the accented, without a tremor."<sup>4</sup> But although this perfect English-iambic line reveals the artist's technique, Mrs. Keynell feels that still greater power is shown in the onslaught of such lines--"heroic with a difference," she calls them--as report

1. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

2. "Some Thoughts of a Reader of Tennyson," *Hearts of Controversy*, p. 5.

3. "Swinburne's Lyrical Poetry," *op. cit.*, p. 62.

4. *Ibid.*

"the short-breathed messenger's reply to Althea's question by whose hands  
the bear of Calydon had died;

A maiden's and a prophet's and thy son's.<sup>1</sup>

But if blank verse, so full of energy and fire in the hands of a master, had been restored to power by a contemporary poet, she felt that modern poetry had suffered a proportionate privation in the loss of the couplet of Marvell's time, restrained yet flexible. "We have lost," she says, "the wild humor that wore so well the bonds of two equal lines, and was wild with so much order, invention, malice, gaiety, polish, equilibrium, vitality—in a word the couplet of the past."<sup>2</sup>

Even the couplet of the following century, constrained as it often was to unimaginative uses, was, she felt, a distinct aid if not to great, at least to mediocre poetry, since its very precision of form often prevented the poet's tumid fancy from wandering too great a distance from his subject. Discussing a typical instance of this kind—the "bullying epitaph" which two "brother Masons" had written for Sterne's tomb at Bayswater—Mrs. Maymott says:

Here are couplets turned with the metrical ability of the day, and making cleverly thinking to move with precision...The confusion of images and of purposes in this composition needs no exposing. Its coherence is nevertheless invested with that virtue of propriety which the age of the couplet possessed, to the extraordinary gain of all secondary literature.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 83.

2. "The Sea Wall," *Ceres' Runaway*: London, 1809, p. 59.

3. "A Tomb in Bayswater," *Second Person Singular*, p. 40.

Dignity, according to Mrs. Maynell, is too lofty a name for a quality so inessential, and although the grim verses are both classical and paltry at once, yet it must be admitted that modern would-be poets, possessed of poetic gifts no higher than those of the two "brother Masons," would have turned their verse with less self-possession and balance.

But if the couplet was sometimes an aid to concise expression, it might, with almost equal frequency prove an obstacle. This she found to be especially true of such a poet as Crabbe. True, he was not "a poet of poetry," yet his limited powers were further hampered by the fact that "he came into possession of a metrical form charged by secondary poets with a contented second-class dignity that bears constant reference, in the way of respect rather than of imitation to the state and nobility of Pope at his best."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the weak yet rigid poetry that Crabbe wrote owed all its decorum to the mechanical defenses and props of this manner of versification. "The grievous thing was," she notes, "that, being moved to write simply of simple things, he had no more supple English for his purpose."<sup>2</sup>

But if Crabbe's couplets offended by their rigidity, the couplets of Keats offended still more by a laxity amounting almost to enervation. In her eyes, "Endymion" was to be condemned by its versification even more than by its too great sweetness. "It is lamentable," she says, "that there was no one to warn him against the couplet, for the sake of the couplet as much as for his own sake."<sup>3</sup> For, in this poem, Mrs. Maynell

1. "A Derivation," The Spirit of Place: London, 1898, p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

3. "The Five Odes of Keats," Pall Mall Gazette, Sept. 29, 1897.

felt, there was much rich poetry disguised in deplorable couplets. She objected in particular to Keats' tendency to finish the couplet between the transitive verb and the accusative to come. Likewise she pointed out how frequently there occurs in "Endymion" "the helpless leaning on the rhyme, the unbraced couplings, the slipping, the giving way of those two poor props of lines ill-built."<sup>1</sup> "If such disastrous writing had gained authority," she observed, "the heroic couplet must have suffered more corruption in our literature than might have been well repaired in a hundred years."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite the pitfalls into which its unwary writer might fall, Mrs. Maynell advocated a return of the heroic couplet--but with reservations. "The controlling couplet," she said, "might stay with a touch a modern grief as it ranged in order the sorrows of Canning for his son. But it should not be attempted without a distinct intention of submission on the part of the writer. The couplet transgressed against, trespassed upon, shaken off, is like a law outstripped, defied--to the dignity neither of the rebel nor of the rule."<sup>3</sup>

A discussion of the heroic couplet leads almost inevitably to a discussion of the Alexandrine. It was Cowley, says Mrs. Maynell, who first passed beyond the heroic line, or at least began to use the Alexandrine freely and at his pleasure amid heroic verse. Dryden followed his example, and after him, Pope. Yet neither Dryden nor Pope

1. "Thomas Lovell Beddoes," Second Person Singular, p. 77

2. "The Five Odes of Keats," op. cit.

3. "Composition," The Rhythm of Life, London, 1893, p. 58.

wrote perfect Alexandrines. "Both of these masters," she says, "when they wrote Alexandrines wrote them in the French manner, with a caesura midway, and an Alexandrine so divided has not unity. It is an arbitrary joining of two lines."<sup>1</sup> Cowley, however, wrote with more artistry since he was able to prevent even an accidental pause, for he made the middle of his line fall upon the middle of some word that was rapid in the speaking, and therefore indivisible by pause or even by any lingering. Such an Alexandrine is the following:

Like some fair pine e'erlooking all the  
ignobler wood,<sup>2</sup>

Here the "long wand of the line does not give way in the middle," but is strong, supple, and unbroken. Indeed, says Mrs. Maynell, Cowley attempted to bequeath a line all life and animation to English metres, but the bequest was not received, to the great loss of English letters. "If Cowley's delicate example had ruled in English poetry," she declares, "(and he surely had authority on this one point at least) the Alexandrine had not broken in two; it would have taken its own place as an important law of English metre, more mobile than the heroic, less fitted to epic or dramatic poetry, but a line liberally lyrical. It would have been the light, pursuing wave that runs suddenly, outrunning twenty, further up the sands than these, a swift traveler, unrepent, of longer impulse, of more impetuous foot, of fuller and of hastier breath, more eager to speak, and yet more reluctant to have done."

1. "Abraham Cowley," Pall Mall Gazette, April 28, 1897.

2. -Ibid.

But important as was the verse form into which a poem was cast, equally important, in Mrs. Maynell's estimation, was the metrical pattern which the poet selected as the vehicle for his thought. "No real reader of poetry," she maintained, "can think of a poet's versification as a thing apart, or as anything but the poet's very muse."<sup>1</sup> She regretted that the varying practices of English poets in regard to quantity, stress, and modulation, led so frequently to confusion in the art of versification. "Quantity," she observed, "is almost entirely disregarded by this writer, and much studied by that; one keeps something like musical time, and never cuts a bar short, another does but count his numbers and place his accents; and, moreover, there are poets who write now in this manner, now in that."<sup>2</sup> Thus it follows inevitably that these metres which are not as definite as the heroic line must often be ambiguous, that is, they can be read in two ways--"either trippingly as common musical syllables would be spoken, or else with veritable musical rests within the line." And it makes all the difference which of the two readings is taken, especially in such lines as the following:

Is she fair as now she lies?  
Once she was fair.

"Here," says Mrs. Maynell, "there is obviously a quaver rest at the end of the first line; but in order to keep the trochaic movement, there should be a quaver rest also after "was," or--which has the same effect of time--the long syllable should be so pronounced as to give it a double

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1. "Christina Rossetti," Pall Mall Gazette, January 4, 1895.  
2. Ibid.

value. And, as read, the line has three beats. "But," she warns, "the reader is just as likely to change the movement and to read it with but two beats, making the line begin with a dactyl. Or, again, with three beats trochaically, with a strong accent on was and a quaver rest after it."<sup>1</sup> English versification being what it is, Mrs. Maynell feels that it is incumbent on the poet to make the matter clear for the reader by the analogies of other verses in the same poem. When the writer fails to do this, as Christina Rossetti failed to do it in the poem just quoted, he commits a serious fault of versification, and reveals the fact that he knows too little of the theory of his art.

That it is possible to write without this metrical ambiguity, however, is revealed by the actual practice of many writers. For example, Francis Thompson has chosen this same "strong, balanced, and weighty rhythm" for his "Carrier Song" and has used the form with undoubted mastery. "How much of march, of elasticity, and of dignity, would this 'Carrier Song' of his lose," wrote Mrs. Maynell, "if the reader were to take it in dactyle. It would have the weak movement of tripping and rolling, as it were, by mere force of gravitation, instead of the living and controlled action of forward feet or lifting wings. But," she affirms, "Mr. Thompson's verse in this piece would certainly not be ambiguous to any reader of average knowledge; no such reader would commit the error of taking it in dactyle. It is therefore possible, in spite of the too-great liberty of the English habit (which allows many syllables

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1. Ibid.



to be long or short accented or unaccented at the writer's pleasure) to make the time and form of the verses apparent."<sup>1</sup>

But it must not be supposed that Mrs. Maynell was in favor of strictly quantitative verse in English poetry. She did not, for example, always agree with the practice of Meredith, who, she says, "uses quantity in a manner unusual in English or in any modern verse. Those of his poems in which this peculiarity occurs," she continues, "should be read in time as music is sung. Negroes would recite them to perfection." To illustrate her meaning, Mrs. Maynell quotes two lines from "Love in the Valley":

Levely are the curves of the white owl  
sweeping  
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.

"This," she writes, "is indeed tempe marcate; and we cannot but think the insistent rhythm is undignified. To thresh to, to march to, to rock, or dance a baby to, quantitative verse is all very well; but accent is sufficient for poetry which is read in repose."<sup>2</sup>

But if the insistent rhythm of such a poem as "Love in the Valley" is to be deplored, so likewise are the equivocal metres of those poets whose unskillful technique forces the hapless reader to scan a line twice before he can make the syllables take the arbitrary stress. Such practices make the modification of rhythmic laws seem desirable, and Mrs. Maynell feels that the time has come when quantity might once

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1. Ibid.

2. "George Meredith," in "Reviews and Views," Merry England, August, 1883.

for all be acknowledged by rule as definitely as rhyme. "After all," she writes, "our poets of rhythmic liberty have always submitted to laws of rhyme more severe than the rules of French or Italian rhyme--- positively and not merely relatively more severe, even though both the French and the Italians have their inexhaustible supply of verbs rhyming by conjugations together...If then," she concludes, "English poets can strictly mediate the muse in rhyme, it need not be feared that they would prove indecile to an equally imperative code of meter."<sup>1</sup>

As to the measures used in English poetry, Mrs. Maynell has stated her preferences quite definitely: "I live," she says, "to see English poetry move to many measures, to many numbers, but chiefly with the simple iambic and simple trochaic feet. Those two are enough for the infinite variety of the epic, the drama, the lyric, of our poetry."<sup>2</sup> Even more definitely did she record her dislike of the anapaest, which she regarded as "the only quite vulgar metre in English verse." "Its fault," she says, "is more than a mere lack of dignity; it has a showy satisfaction and confidence that will not be ignored."<sup>3</sup> The swagger, the strut, the capering of the English anapaest produced effects too obvious for her delicately sensitive ear. She objected even to Swinburne's anapaests, which, as she notes, are far too delicate for such bluster, because "for all

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1. "Jean Ingelow as a Poet", Pall Mall Gazette, July 26, 1897.
  2. "Swinburne" Hearts of Controversy, p. 61.
  3. "Wares of Autolyous," Pall Mall Gazette, October 6, 1893.

their spring, all their flight, all their flutter," we are compelled to perceive that, as it were, they perform.<sup>1</sup> Let us then, she pleads, look upon the use of the anapaest as an experiment done with. She points out as significant the fact that Tennyson, Browning and Coventry Patmore have all shunned it, and yet have been able to evoke from the iambic and trochaic measures music that is at once controlled and fluent.

After reading this defense of the traditional metres, it is not surprising to find that English movement toward free verse received little sympathy from Mrs. Meynell. Liberty through law was for her the more accepted method, and the ideal poet was one like Coventry Patmore, who, in writing the eodes, "used a free metre because he knew himself to be set at liberty by his very knowledge and love of law."<sup>2</sup> Yet rigidity, formalism, and conventionality, were qualities she abhorred in poetry. The accepted English metres, she felt, left ample room for the exercise of individual genius, for there was a directed liberty that, like the seasons admit of "inflexion, not infraction." In her poem on "The English Metres" she has thus describes them:

The rooted liberty of flowers in breeze  
Is theirs, by national luck impulsive, terse,  
Tethered, uncaptured.....

And in the essay on Coventry Patmore she has further elucidated her

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1. "Swinburne," op. cit.

2. "Coventry Patmore" Second Person Singular, p. 100.

views by an analogy:

The most beautiful of all gardens, is assuredly not that which is rather forest or field than garden, the 'landscape garden' of a false taste; nor, on the other hand, the shaven and trimmed and weeded parterre with an unstarred lawn; but rather the garden long ago strictly planned, rigidly ordered, architecturally piled, smooth and definite, but later set free, given over to time and the sun, not a wilderness, but having an enclosed wildness, a directed liberty, a designed magnificence and excess.

Comparable to such a garden, she says, should be the poet's mind, "obedient to an ancient law, but wildly natural under an inspiration of visiting winds and a splendid sun of genius."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the restriction of metre is to her as a bondage of love which, once accepted, gives scope for a deeper fulfillment. In her invocation to the laws of verse she writes:

Take all my frame, and make your close arms meet  
Around me; and so ruled, so warmed, so pressed  
I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat.<sup>2</sup>

And again, echoing the statement already quoted that verse which is too easy cannot be said to fly for the paradoxical reason that it has no weight, she exclaims:

Dear laws, be wings to me!  
The feather merely floats. O be it heard  
Through weight of life--the skylark's gravity--  
That I am not a feather but a bird.<sup>3</sup>

That her opposition to the English free verse movement was not the

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1. Ibid., p. 137.

2. "The Laws of Verse," The Poems of Alice Meynell, p. 130.

3. Ibid.

result of anything so unimaginative as mere formalism is shown by her complete sympathy with the vers libre movement in France. The French rules were not wisely tempered restraints, they were shackles; therefore, she felt, they ought to be removed. A very illuminating discussion of this viewpoint is to be found in her criticism of Paul Claudel's *L'Otage*:

...As one of the leaders of the vers libre movement, M. Claudel is a very moderate revolutionary....And what shackles he has broken the English reader can only wonder have been fastened on for these centuries. For the severity of French versification has this paradoxical result--it gives unfortunate liberty, laxity, to thought, meaning, and phrase. It is not too much to say that a French poet is bound by the immovable caesura, the alteration of masculine and feminine rhymes couplets, and numbers that must never be tampered with, to fill up at times with platitudes or clichés.<sup>1</sup>

Discussing the comparative liberty of English versification she writes:

English critics who complain that Pope's caesura 'nearly always' occurs in the same place hardly realize that this is license compared with the French law. The French Alexandrine, broken in the middle and nowhere else makes a little prison of six syllables at a time, and such necessities imply commonplace that only a master such as Victor Hugo need not submit. Add to these laws the not-counting of the unaccented "e" before a vowel and the counting thereof before a consonant. Who can wonder at a French revolution?

What is to be marvelled at, she says, is the English mimicry, the following of French innovations by English writers who have so much liberty already.

For we have every variety of stress, pause, redundant members, if we will; an interchange of stress and quantity, vowels and consonants, at will fluent or slashing, a little latitude even of rhyme and no alteration

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1. "L'Otage of Paul Claudel," Dublin Review, July, 1918, p. 62.

of masculine (single rhymes) and feminine (disyllabic;) all liberty to delight the mind and ear in what manner of delight we choose.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, to "free" oneself from the laws of English verse, which are as wings to the poet's feet, is, she feels, but the last folly of unintelligent imitation.

But poetic form and meter, though important, are, after all but the externals of the poet's art. There were other very definite tests applied by Mrs. Maynell in her evaluation of poetry. A study of these further qualities which she considered essential to the highest art throws light upon her literary judgments, and helps to explain why her fellow-critics looked upon her mind as a tribunal "preeminently critical, acutely sensitive to the enduring qualities of poetry," and why they felt that "beyond all critics she has the gift of going straight to the heart of her subject, and of wrapping up the essential in the briefest phrases."<sup>2</sup>

At the outset it is necessary to understand what she means by the term "classic" as applied to poetry, since it is not only her highest term of praise but the most searching word in her critical vocabulary:

Of many words of praise, the word "classic" is chosen because it suggests no exclusions of schools or kinds, nor even any preferences for poetry of one kind of perfection to the slighting of another. None the

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1. Ibid., p. 63.

2. The Academy, "A New Anthology," Saturday, Nov. 18, 1897, p. 391.

less is it the most sharp and severe of all words of criticism, or it shall here have that character if the reader will agree to understand as "classic" all poetry that is one--thought and word. The fusion of thought and word is unmistakable whether the fire of an impassioned thought bring it to pass, or the close coldness of fancy made perfect;...but, it is less by the fusion of fire that a greatly classic poem is to be figured, than by a more vital union; mind and body, where tidal thought and feeling are quick with the blood and various with the breath of life, give a juster, as well as a simpler and a more human image of a vital poem.<sup>1</sup>

The classic poem, then, with its unity of thought and idea implies very definite attributes on the part of the writer. The first thing to be expected of a poet, according to Mrs. Meynell is a "perfect personal distinctness of experience." Poetry she called "the loneliest of all arts,"<sup>2</sup> and observed truly that "the individual note, the separate voice, is the first thing we listen for when a poet begins to sing."<sup>3</sup> This uniqueness of personal experience, and this freshness of literary impulse are imperative because "to utilize the mental experience of many is inevitably to use their verse and phrase."<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean, however, that the poet must alienate himself from the past or must assume a hasty independence of the present. Mrs. Meynell realized that every poet, no matter how delicately original his thought, is the inheritor of literary traditions that it would be folly to ignore. But only when the legacy of the past has been as-

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1. "Coventry Patmore," Second Person Singular, p. 95.
  2. "Marriage of True Minds," Fall Mall Gazette, Nov. 10, 1897.
  3. "Meredith," in "Reviews and Views," Merry England, Aug. 1883.
  4. "Innocence and Experience," The Rhythm of Life, p. 99.

simulated into the very fibres of the poet's mind, only when what he has received has been so intimately realized as to be truly his own, can he hope to attain to an art that is personal, separate, and free from "the common sanction of other men's summaries and conclusions." The problem of the poet's indebtedness to the past has been well expressed by Mrs. Meynell in "A Song of Derivations:"

I come from nowhere, but from where  
Come the undying thoughts I bear?  
Down, through long links of death and birth,  
From the past poets of the earth,  
My immortality is there.

I am like the blossom of an hour,  
But long, long vanished sun and shower  
Awake my breath i' the young world's air;  
I track the past back everywhere  
Through seed and flower and seed and flower.

Or I am like a stream that flows  
Full of the cold springs that arose  
In morning lands, in distant hills:  
And down the plain my channel fills  
With melting of forgotten snows.

Voices, I have not heard, possessed  
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed  
With relics of the far unknown.  
And mixed with memories not my own  
The sweet streams throng into my breast.

Before this life began to be  
The happy songs that wake in me  
Wake long ago and far apart.  
Heavily on this little heart  
Pressed this immortality.

But, if, despite its indebtedness to the past, the poem is to bear the

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1. "A Song of Derivations," The Poems of Alice Meynell, pp. 44-46



the unmistakable stamp of the artist's individuality, it must spring from generous and authentic emotion, "that quality which is vulgarly taken for granted in all poets and has created a whole convention of 'poetic diction', but exists in very few."<sup>1</sup>

Equally important in Mrs. Meynell's estimation was the intellectual standard in the evaluation of poetry. Intellectual quality she called "the vitality of all poetry that is not song only, but poetry and song."<sup>2</sup> And again, "It is a great thing to be caught to a poet's heart; it is perhaps a greater to come close to his mind." In a discussion of Coleridge's poetry she justifies this statement: "Nevertheless," she says, "inasmuch as reason is the greatest and most human of all things in the world, the greatest poet has imagination of the intellect as well as imagination of the senses."<sup>3</sup> But to say that poetry is intellectual is not "to accuse it of reasoning or proving--nor on the other hand to imply that it lacks imagery or other kind of inventive beauty." Rather, it gives "not the process but the fruit and flower of reasoning."

But not all poets are gifted with what Mrs. Meynell called "intellectual imagination." Next in rank, therefore, to poetry of the intellect she places the poetry of "the imaginative senses."<sup>4</sup> Exaltation of the senses, she observes, "is the best thing that can befall a simple

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1. "Blancmer Sweetman's Poems," Merry England, Feb. 1894, p. 292..

2. "The Swan of Lichfield," Second Person Singular, p. 64.

3. "The Ancient Mariner," Pall Mall Gazette, September 22, 1897.

4. "The Ancient Mariner," Pall Mall Gazette, September 22, 1897.

poet;" and she regards Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" as the most surpassing of all poems of this order. Here the faculties of sight, of hearing, of feeling raised to an intensity which becomes almost spiritual. As an example of the exaltation of the sense of sight she quotes the vision of the rising moon:

The climbing moon went up the sky  
And nowhere did abide  
Softly she was going up  
And a star or two beside.

As an instance of the exaltation of hearing she points out the passage of the singing spirits around the mast; and for the exaltation of touch the stanza when it rains:

And still my body drank.

Since finely developed sense perception is so important a part of the equipment of a poet, it follows that the poetic impulse frequently finds expression in the various kinds of imagery--visual, auditory, gustatory, and tactile. Indeed, says Mrs. Meynell, "to most of the great poets no greater praise can be given than praise of their imagery. Imagery is the natural language of their poetry. Without a parable she scarcely speaks."<sup>1</sup> But she recognized a higher poetry--a poetry beyond imagery--"poetry that has the more dreadful solitude of an experience, and goes

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1. "Conventry Patmore's Odes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 89.

far in an inverse flight through the essentially single human heart--intimately into time and space, remotely into the heart of hearts."<sup>1</sup> An understanding of what Mrs. Meynell means by poetry of this type--poetry that leaves imagery behind in the way of approaches--is most important, since it is one of the most significant of her principles of criticism.

In discussing this theory of poetry--poetry that transcends "the apparelled and arrayed approaches and ritual of literature," and, going further, is admitted "among simple realities and anti-types"<sup>2</sup> --Mrs. Meynell writes:

Undoubtedly there is now and then a poet who touches the thing, not its likeness, too vitally, too sensitively, for even such a pause as the verse makes for love of the beautiful image. Those rare moments are simple, and their simplicity makes one of the reader's keenest experiences. Other simplicities may be achieved by lesser art, but this is transcendent simplicity. There is nothing in the world more costly. It vouches for the beauty which it transcends; it answers for the riches it forbears; it implies the art which it fulfills. All abundance ministers to it though it is so single.<sup>3</sup>

Imagination, then according to Alice Meynell, is not at its greatest until it passes beyond imagery into that vital country "whither truth is simple and poetry bare."<sup>4</sup> The greatest poet is one who has attained his highest stature "because he has a full vision of the mystery of realities, not because he has a clear invention of similitudes."<sup>5</sup>

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1. "Coventry Patmore's Odes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 88.
  2. "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," Hearts of Controversy, p. 90.
  3. "Coventry Patmore's Odes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 89.
  4. "Henry Vaughan," Pall Mall Gazette, September 8, 1897.
  5. "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," Hearts of Controversy, p. 91.

Thus she regards such lines as Shakespeare's

Of many thousand kisses the poor last

and Chaucer's

Now with his love, now in the cold<sup>d</sup> grave

as poetry "on the yonder side of imagery." Such poetry she finds profoundly moving, since in its immediate apprehension of reality it is almost insupportably close to spiritual facts. Imagery, on the other hand, she maintains, is for the time when "the shock of feeling (which must needs pass as the heart beats and pauses) is gone by." Thus she finds that a great poet may often be "both a major and a minor mystic in the self-same poem; now suddenly close to his mystery (which is his greater moment) and anon making it mysterious with imagery (which is the moment of his most splendid lines)."<sup>1</sup>

The relation which exists between poetry of imagery, and poetry beyond imagery, has been explained by Mrs. Keynell in both her prose and poetry. "The student," she says, "passes delighted through the several courts of poetry, from the outer to the inner, from riches to more imaginative riches, and from decoration to more complex decoration; and prepares himself for the greater opulence of the innermost chamber. But when he crosses the last threshold he finds this mid-most sanctuary to be a hypaethral temple, and in its custody and care a simple earth and a

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1. Ibid., p. 92.

space of sky."<sup>1</sup>

A similar concept is the theme of her poem "The Courts: A Figure of the Epiphany:"

The poet's imageries are noble ways,  
Approaches to a plot, an open shrine.  
Their splendours, colours, avenues, arrays,  
Their courts that run with wine.

Beautiful similes, "fair and fragrant things,"  
Enriched, enamouring, --raptures, metaphors  
Enhancing life, are paths for pilgrim kings  
Made free of golden doors.

And yet the open heavenward plot, with dew,  
Ultimate poetry, enclosed, enskyed  
(Albeit such ceremonies lead thereto)  
Stands on the yonder side.

Plain, behind oracles, it is; and past  
All symbols, simple; perfect, heavenly-wild,  
The song some loaded poets reach at last--  
The kings that fount a Child.<sup>2</sup>

But she realizes that this "ultimate poetry" cannot often be achieved, even by a major poet. "To have attained it once or twice," she says, "is to have proved such gift and grace as a true history of literature would show to be above price, even gauged by the rude measure of rarity. Transcendent simplicity could not possibly be habitual. Man lives within garments and veils, and art is chiefly concerned with making mysteries of these for the loveliness of his life; when they are rent asunder it is impossible not to be aware that an overwhelming human emotion has been in action."<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., pp. 92-93.

2. "The Courts," Poems of Alice Meynell, p. 87.

3. "Conventry Patmore's Odes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 90.

But if all poetry cannot attain this high simplicity, it should at least--if it is to be considered authentic--possess the fundamental quality of sincerity. Yet the mere fact of sincerity is not so significant as is its quality. "When we call a fine writer sincere," she says, "we mean, needless to say, that his sincerity is of value, that it is of importance in its source within his character, in his action when it causes his choice, and in the communication that is his word and his art--important and of interest and great moment at every stage of that progress."

Readers of Mrs. Meynell's critical essays are sometimes surprised to find that one of the highest terms of praise which she can apply to a poem is to call it "wild." Such poetry has in it the elements of "flight," of "remoteness," of "escape." It is haunted by the sun, the moon, stars, and the winds of the world. Yet it would be a mistake to regard this poetry written, to use Emerson's phrase, "a little wildly and with the flower of the mind," as uncontrolled. "For the wild thing to her," as Anne Kimball Tuell points out, "is never the outrageous, the untamable, or even the romantic, never the barbaric....It is a beauty that has known the utmost loveliness that man can make and then has run away...It is a quality fine and fugitive, imperfect but untouched, like the runaway flower slipped from the symmetry of gardens and the humiliation of repeating patterns."<sup>2</sup> An excellent example of what Mrs. Meynell understood

1. "Miss Mitford," Pall Mall Gazette, February 23, 1898.

2. Anne Kimball Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation, p. 179.

by "wildness" in poetry is quoted by Viola Meynell from Shakespeare:

In such a night  
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand  
Upon the wild sea banks, and waved her love  
To come again to Carthage.<sup>1</sup>

Life, light, and distance Mrs. Meynell also regarded as high characteristics of poetry, and she placed the emphasis upon light. "The image of life is the measure and proof of poetry," she wrote; but even more valuable was the sense of light as an indication of the authentic Muse. "Il vous semble que cette femme dégage de la lumière en marchant?" she says, quoting Marius in Les Misérables, "C'est fini--vous l'aimez." "It is even so by a sense of light," she concludes, "that you know the Muse you are to love."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the culmination of the traits which Mrs. Meynell looked for in poetry was a sense of peace, "which seems," she writes, "to make an eternal quality of poetry."<sup>3</sup> In poems that leave the reader with a sense of emotional unrest, the fault lies in the fact that the fusing work of passion is not complete. Moreover, this high repose which she considers necessary to great art should be unconscious of appearances. True, an author should be anxious for the result of his phrase upon the educated ear, yet "he should be lifted above anxiety for appearances or the result of his phrase upon the untaught."<sup>4</sup> .... "He must be afraid of nothing who writes at the greatest heights," she declared, and the reward

1. Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 208.

2. "Henry Vaughan," Full Mall Gazette, September 8, 1897.

3. "Sidney Dobell," Second Person Singular, p. 80.

4. "George Meredith," Second Person Singular, p. 118.

of such a procedure is loftiness and a classic simplicity.

But if there were certain elements to be sought for in poetry, there were other qualities just as definite which she felt should be avoided. Foremost among these was exaggeration which she regarded as "a relaxing and depressing custom at best,"<sup>1</sup> and as "the violence of a weakling hand--the worst manner of violence."<sup>2</sup> The chief evil of exaggeration, she believed, lay in the lack of proportion between word and feeling. "The brag of disproportion," she writes, "is perhaps the most modern thing in the world....Exaggeration is a growing habit, bad for a writer and bad for the current language upon which effects are cumulative. Boasting, also, as Durdles told Mr. Sapsea, grows upon you."<sup>3</sup> This is unfortunately true because, as she points out in her essay on Mrs. Browning, "an uneasy force, an anxious decisiveness, a spurred impulsiveness, a very habit and trick of violence" when once acquired as an assertion of strength must be repeated continually because the tense effort would otherwise leave the language lax.<sup>4</sup>

Exaggeration, she felt, could not be justified even in the wildest literature. Poetry, she maintained, may be extreme, extravagant, insane even, and yet not exaggerated. The first cold touch of exaggeration is not only immediately recognizable, but it acts as a disappointment, a

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1. "Exaggeration," Pall Mall Gazette, September 2, 1898.

2. "Dickens As a Man of Letters," Hearts of Controversy, p. 26.

3. "Exaggeration," op. cit.

4. "Wares of Autolyous," Pall Mall Gazette, Nov. 3, 1897.



check, a disillusion. "No noise, no emphasis, no banging and slamming will disguise it or make it pass," she writes. "At the first perception of it we cool and turn away, and are not to be won back."<sup>1</sup>

Not exaggeration, therefore, but mastery is an index of power in poetry. "It is mastery and not violence," she writes, "that so comes home, dividing soul and spirit. There is not a violence in the world that does not seem a discomfiture and an essential weakness when reproached by such a majestic energy, able to curb its hand."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise she waged constant war against habit in literature. The habitual word used and reused until the meaning was worn out of it, the conventional phrase, the cliché--these, she felt, were detrimental to the vitality and sincerity of language. "There should be nothing at all habitual in literature," she wrote in Merry England in 1888, and she felt that every movement should have "a special intention, an impulse to itself, a special thought."<sup>3</sup> It is habitual imagery more than anything else, she believed, that deprives a language of elasticity and leaves it either rigid or languid.<sup>4</sup> Thus to separateness of experience must be added separateness of diction if the currency of the writer's style is to remain fresh-minted, and not worn thin by constant use. Thus, too, is true originality of expression to be achieved. "That man," says Alice Meynell, "who never wrote words by habit--another's

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1. "The Soldier's Post," Merry England, April, 1883.
  2. "Coventry Patmore," Second Person Singular, p. 86.
  3. "Mr. W.E. Henley's Poems," Merry England, June, 1888.
  4. "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," Hearts of Controversy, p. 79.

habit or his own--assuredly stands eternally single, however the multitude surrounds him."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most deplorable results of the habitual in literature is what Mrs. Meynell calls literary "trash." "Trash, in the fulness of its insimplicity and cheapness," she writes, "is impossible without a beautiful past. Its chief characteristic--which is futility, not failure--could not be achieved but by the long abuse, the rotary reproduction, the quotidian disgrace, of the utterances of art, especially the utterance by words."<sup>2</sup> And yet such literature had its high antecedents: "Gaiety, vigour, vitality, the organic quality, purity, simplicity, precision--all these are the antecedents of trash. It is after them; it is also, alas, because of them."<sup>3</sup>

But if the habitual is to be avoided in writing, so likewise is a too-great facility. The habit of "dash" and impulse can never, according to Mrs. Meynell, make for the most perfect and most valuable sincerity. "The most absolute of all human avowals," she writes, "takes time; it is recollected and gathered close, is deliberate and makes no such emphatic noise as might quench the sound of its own breathing and its own living heart. Candour is gentle, vigilant, and attentive to itself."<sup>4</sup>

If much of Mrs. Meynell's criticism was devoted to poetry, a large proportion of it was also concerned specifically with prose literature. Fiction--especially the philosophical novel--she regarded as "the companion

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1. "Wares of Autolyous," Full Mall Gazette, Nov. 24, 1893.

2. "Decivilized," The Rhythm of Life, p. 9.

3. Ibid.

4. "Mrs. Thrale as a Writer," Full Mall Gazette, Dec. 13, 1895.

of poetry, and thus the second great imaginative art of letters."<sup>1</sup> But if the novel was raised to this high eminence in modern times, it was, she felt, chiefly because of the influence of one man--George Meredith. "Victor Hugo," she wrote, "had not the intellect, nor Flaubert the purpose, nor George Eliot the drama, nor Thackeray the tolerance, that in union could achieve such an exaltation of an art that was at once a pastime."<sup>2</sup> She saw in the development of the novel the evolution of a most important literary genus. The picaresque novel, the novel of irony, the novel of invention, the novel of morals, and the novel of emotion, even in the hands of such masters as Le Sage, Cervantes, Balzac, or the Brontës, must take, she declared, "an intermediate, an arbitrary, and a partial place" in the development of the art, since the novel in its most perfect form is to be found in that "work of intellect and philosophy in fiction, the novel that watches life, perceives, detects, indeed, but has also the spiritual insight, wisdom as well as knowledge, and not only temperament but passion; that not only states the problem but accounts for it."<sup>3</sup>

Such a novel, she feels, is truly a criticism of life. Discussing this contention, she declares that when Matthew Arnold called poetry a criticism of life, the phrase was taken away from the novel to which it should belong. Philosophic novelists, of whom there have not been many in the history of English letters, are "the chief critics of human life--social life, civilized life, the life of the race and of races, and that of a man and a woman; even a great novelist," she continues, "who is not

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

a philosopher--Thackeray for example--is a critic of life in ethics, its emotions, and its shows; the novelist who is a humorist also does his admirable part of criticism."<sup>1</sup> The ideal novelist, however, is one who takes "the whole social man into his grasp and his vision" and who bends all the powers of a vigilant mind and of a human heart upon the study of character.

But the novel did not always have such high functions. "The story," she says, "was not at first used for the purposes of pity, terror, and purification, but merely for fun."<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside as exceptions the Book of Job, the Book of Genesis, and the parables of the Gospel, we find the art of story telling, whether in Arabia or in Tuscany, devised chiefly or altogether for pastime. It is an art of childish origins--the pretending that such and such things came to pass, the making things come to pass at the speaker's whim. It is an arbitrary make-believe and irresponsible, whereas the drama must, as it were, make good its words by making a show."<sup>3</sup> In Italy, too, the early novel raised a laugh, though its jests were often unchildish. There, "says Mrs. Meynell, "its stories ended happily even though iniquitously. A mere pastime, it filled none but the idlest hour, or the weariest hour of rest. Boccaccio's fictions were proportionate. There was little of them and they did not encroach." The question which confronts the modern critic, however, is whether fiction--now become a custom and a habit--is proportionate. "When," she writes, "the pastime

1. Ibid., p. 120.

2. "Pessimism in Fiction," Second Person Singular, P. 122.

3. Ibid.

of the greater number--the reading of the novel--is charged by the novelist with so many functions as it now carries we cannot but wonder that irresponsible hands should claim, and into those hand should be given, purposes so various and purporting to be so grave."<sup>1</sup>

She believes that the novelist--though answerable to no one, and bound to no facts--has a tremendous responsibility, since in his art lies the power of suggestion that is followed by thousands. For this reason she deplores the tendency toward pessimism in modern fiction. The casual reader, she declares opens the novel for pleasure, and before he knows it, "a pessimist has him by the ear, having captured him at the mischief of his idleness and his desire for passive pleasure." Pessimism, she feels, is a kind of intellectual and spiritual sloth, a fact which the author, if he were frank, would admit; for pessimism, according to Mrs. Meynell, is the easier way. The harmful results of this tendency, she believes, are twofold; one is "the obvious destruction of comedy, but the other, equally lamentable though less obvious, is the destruction of tragedy."<sup>2</sup> "If pessimism," she says in explanation, "robs us of laughter it has done worse by 'beguiling us of our tears', not that for its sake they are, but that they are not shed."

But if Mrs. Meynell objected to pessimism in the novel, still more did she object to a sentimental optimism. In neither extreme, she felt was the answer to the enigma of human life to be found. "Intelligible joy and grief," she writes, "are in the midways, and in the midways there is

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1. Ibid.,

2. Ibid., p. 124.

cause for as much sadness as our human hearts can hold."<sup>1</sup>

Although the novel occupies the major place in modern fiction, the short story as a distinct art form is, in Mrs. Meynell's estimation, no less deserving of critical study. Short stories, she declares, should be neither fragments nor compressions because "in the one case they lack organic unity and a reason for their being; and in the other they have a lack of the characteristics proper to their size. A lifetime told briefly," she says in explanation, "may serve many useful purposes, but however useful it may be, and however discreetly the events may be sketched for influence, purpose, and effect, the whole does not give us a short story written in obedience to the necessities of its kind."<sup>2</sup> Neither does the literary fragment fulfill the requirements of the short story, because "it has too much leisure, it pauses among trivialities, and the effect is that of too much weight, or rather of too many weights, with the resulting futility."<sup>3</sup> But an even more deplorable result is that in such fragmentary writing organic unity is lost, and this is a quality which, because it is a sign of vitality, she finds essential to all great art. The ideal short story, then, is one "which possesses at its heart a central incident vital (or mortal), and always sufficient as a reason why the story should be told." Moreover, "all the conditions, the details, the characteristics surround this incident and are told because of it; all have their value, subordinately, and therefore free from that over-emptiness

1. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

2. "How to Write Stories," *Merry England*, July, 1888, p. 137.

3. *Ibid.*

which makes them dull."<sup>1</sup>

Closely allied to the study of fiction is the problem of prose style. Mrs. Keynell declined to separate style in expression from style in the thought that informs it, for, she says, "they who make such separations can hardly know that style should be in the very conception of a phrase, in its antenatal history, else the word is neither choice nor authentic."<sup>2</sup> It is by this dictum that she separates herself most definitely from the "art for art's sake school in literature, not because she did not see as far as they did, but because she saw farther.

With unerring directness she recognized that the seekers after "purple patches," the writers who selected words as carefully as if they were jewels, and arranged them side by side like precious stones in a jeweller's window, could never attain a style that was organic, vital, vascular, unless the thought that informed the work was also quick with life. "No man," she declares, "can possess a true style who has not something to write, something for the sake of which he writes. This should not be said--it is so simple.... Yet authors are found to aspire to style for its own sake, and to miss it as happiness is missed." In the best style, therefore, thought and feeling are incarnated, not merely clothed, and the result is "the vascular organism of a true literary style in which there is a vital relation of otherwise lifeless word with word."<sup>3</sup>

We have seen that the quest for the exact word--le mot juste--was an important characteristic of literature in the last quarter of the

1. Ibid., p. 137.

2. "James Russell Lowell," Rhythms of Life, p. 70.

3. "The Sun," The Rhythms of Life, p. 19.

nineteenth century, that it was, indeed, to use the words of Ford Madox Ford, "the Holy Grail of the period." To learn, then, that for Alice Keynell the test of the word was an ultimate standard of literary value is to realize how strongly the literary trends of the time had left their impress upon her theories of criticism. Yet to say that her interpretation of the doctrine of the "word" tallied exactly with that of the aesthetic school would be to impugn that originality of thought which she guarded so conscientiously, and to misunderstand seriously her whole critical method. For the most part the aesthetes sought after and were satisfied with external beauty of style. If the language were choice, the phrase exquisitely modulated, the period flawlessly rhythmical, then, in their eyes, the meaning that informed the style was of no special importance. Manner and not matter was the important thing to those who were content with the mere surface effects of beauty. Such a theory, obviously, could not satisfy Alice Keynell because it merely touched externals, and was not greatly concerned with the profundities of emotion, of intellectual experience, or of spiritual insight. If she used le mot juste as a standard of literature, it was because she read into the term a greater significance than did many of her contemporaries. Thus, for her, the word and its import, if valid, formed an organic unity; while the word alone, separated from its meaning was as a lifeless body bereft of its informing spirit.

For this reason she waged incessant war on the representatives of of l'art pour l'art school in literature, upon that "superabundantly,



violently, wearily, immoderately picturesque school that has the knack of beautiful words and uses them to destroy them."<sup>1</sup> Never in the history of the language," she writes, "has the process gone on with wilder speed; and it is our best which is being abused into flaccidity and vapidness--the passionate phrases, the felicitous words, the warmth, and the emotion." To deprive such words of their intrinsic vitality is a fault which she finds difficult to forgive, even as she finds it difficult to forgive the "picturesque novelist" who "has collected a portable vocabulary of glowing Saxon words and uses them in cheap quantities. "Where," she asks, "is nobility of thought, where is chastity of emotion, where is recollection of the faculties to be found in such a literature?"<sup>2</sup>

The fallacy of such an attitude she points out in her essay on "Pocket Vocabularies" where she discusses those poets who "ransacked the language for words full of life and beauty, made a vocabulary of them, and out of wantonness wrote them to death. To change somewhat the simile," she continues, "they scented out a word--an earlyish word by preference--ran it to earth, unearthed it, dug it out, and killed it. And then their followers bagged it."<sup>3</sup> A writer of this type, she says, reasons in somewhat the following manner: "Literature doubtless is made of words. What then is needful, he seems to ask, besides a knack of beautiful words? Unluckily for him," she affirms, "he has achieved, not style, but slang. Unluckily for him, words are not style, phrases are not style. 'The man

1. "W.E. Henley," Merry England, July, 1890, p. 245.

2. "W.E. Henley," Ibid.

3. "Pocket Vocabularies," The Rhythm of Life, p. 41.

is style'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is the whole man with all his qualities and potentialities that is style: "The literature of a man of letters, worthy of the name, is rooted in all his qualities, with little fibres running invisibly into the smallest qualities he has."<sup>2</sup>

Closely associated with Mrs. Meynell's study of the word is her theory of language. Art, she feels, is essentially a communication.<sup>3</sup> It follows, then, that language, the instrument of such communication possesses a value inherent in itself, and is worthy of the critic's scholarly attention, for upon the vitality of the language depends ultimately the writer's art. Modern language, she asserts, tends to become general and inept, while all other things--particularly the modern sciences--tend to become specialized and exact. But it is among English races generally "that an unwillingness to be troubled with the distinctions of grammar has had this effect of making words run errands and serve the first purpose at hand; and it is among English races that inflexions (never numerous or subtle) have been neglected and let fall."<sup>4</sup> For this reason, she feels, the word is often "obliged to do more various things, and to do them with less directness, and, as it were, a less sequestered intention. It is engaged upon enterprises of unskilled labor. The industrial word has less and less craft, less dignity, less leisure, less rest, and more mere utility." This is because "it loses, in the workaday life, its own varieties, amid the varieties of the casual task. It

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1. Ibid.,  
 2. Ibid.,  
 3. "The Audience," Ceres' Runaway, p. 76.  
 4. "Second Person Singular," Second Person Singular, p. 136.

changes not its vesture, and the inflexion is lost."<sup>1</sup> She realizes, however, how impossible it would be under modern conditions to restore to the language that finished and specialized quality which would make it "organic, arranged, logical, full of expressive differences, cases that precisely assign action, and tenses that deal finely with time, turning the future to look upon the past, and anticipating that turn, and making a shifting perspective of the past; distinguishing persons not merely by pointing the rude forefinger of a pronoun, but by the allusion of all the inflexions of a verb."<sup>2</sup>

One restoration, however, that she felt could be effected to the immense gain of poetic diction, was the use of the second person singular with its corresponding tenses. Such a literary restoration she believed "would make our language again more various and more charming, and yet would not turn the speech poetic to vulgar use."<sup>3</sup>

But despite English carelessness in the ways of grammar and inflexion, Mrs. Maynell felt that the language possessed an inestimable advantage in its Latin and Teutonic derivation. These, she writes, "are of all heritages of the English writer the most important," because the writer may submit himself to either school "whither he will take his impulse and his character, where he will leave their influence, and whence he will accept their education."<sup>4</sup> However, she felt that the cult of the unaided Saxon monosyllable, which for a time had such a vogue

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1. Ibid., p. 133.

2. Ibid., p. 134.

3. Ibid., p. 138.

4. "Composition," The Rhythm of Life, p. 66.

in the nineteenth century, resulted very often in little more than journey-man's work. "Men," she says, "were too eager to go into the workshop of language. There were unreasonable raptures over the mere making of common words. 'A hand-shoe! a finger-hat! a fore-word!' they cried." But she stressed the danger of such an attitude: "It seemed to be forgotten," she wrote, "that a language with all its construction visible is a language little fitted for the more advanced mental processes, that its images are material; and that, on the other hand, a certain spiritualising and subtilising effect of alien derivations is a privilege and an advantage incalculable--that to possess that half of the language within which Latin heredities lurk and Romanesque allusions are at play is to possess the state and security of a dead tongue without the death."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it is the Latin element in the language which tends to quell the exaggerated decision of monosyllables, and which possesses "the poise and the pause that imply vitality at times better than headstrong movement expresses it."<sup>2</sup> However, she admits that there are Latinisms and Latinisms! "Those of Gibbon and Johnson, and of their time generally, serve to hold passion at length. They are the mediate and not the immediate utterance of human feeling." But at least one modern poet has realized in his work the immense potentialities of the Latin: "In Francis Thompson" she writes, "the majestic Latin word is forged hot on the anvil of the artificer. No Old English in the making could be readier or closer."<sup>3</sup>

1. "Composure," The Rhythm of Life, p. 58.

2. Ibid., p. 58.

3. Ibid.

In the ideal English style, she believed, there should be a blending of the two inheritances--to the vigor of the Anglo-Saxon should be added the poise and elasticity of the Latin. "One of the most charming things that a writer of English can achieve," she says, "is the repayment of the united teaching by linking their results so exquisitely in his own practice, that the words of the two schools are made to meet each other with a surprise and delight that shall prove them at once gayest strangers and sweeter companions than the world they were."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, according to Mrs. Meynell, the ideal critic is one who is aware not only of the larger aspects of literature, but of the subtle inflections and nuances of the language itself. Still another delicate task that is imposed on the critic is what she called "the noble intellectual work of admiration." "Everyone," she declares, "who undertakes to write on the work of other men knows how the act of homage, more than all other appreciative acts, tests and tries the critical style: sets the critic's words as it were against the sky, forlorn, conspicuous; exposes his platitudes; accuses him with the extremity of rigor, or excuses him with the least delicacy; approves his fastidiousness, secures to him a success honestly come by without noise; or else leaves him uncomfortable in his own prose."<sup>2</sup>

But the act of praise, though so acid a test of the critic's ability, is nevertheless important to one who honestly tries "to interpret by

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1. Ibid., p. 58.

2. "Alexander Smith," Pall Mall Gazette, January 12, 1898.

sympathetic insight a writer's aims, and to estimate the success with which he has accomplished them."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, according to Mrs. Meynell, the best critics "will always use the past, though cautiously, as a corrective to their individual perception." Yet she warns them against a too-literal application of the principles derived from the practice of the great writers of the past. "It was the application to the Elizabethan dramatists of principles based on the practice of the classical dramatists," she declares, "which has made much eighteenth century criticism a by-word to posterity."<sup>2</sup>

Thus it is apparent that if Mrs. Meynell's critical method was not wholly impressionist, neither was it an arbitrary application of rule. Rather, it was a blend of the two modes of procedure. It was a criticism that was made "in the mental solitude which cannot be escaped at the last," but it was yet done "in virtue of the studious training of a lifetime on the responsibility of one, but on the authority of many."<sup>3</sup> "Surely," says the reviewer for the Academy discussing Mrs. Meynell's critical methods, "this is a true and vital critical formula, the mediating formula between that old conception of criticism as merely the application of authority, and that modern conception of it as merely an expression of personal preferences or prejudices. Call criticism 'the adventures of a soul among masterpieces' if you will, but let it be clearly understood

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1. "Reviews and Views," Merry England, July, 1890., p. 241

2. Ibid.

3. Introduction to The Flower of the Mind., p. 6.

that the only valuable adventures are those of a man qualified to have them, just as for Aristotle the only valuable moral judgment was that of the man who was fitted by nature and training to express a judgment. And," he concludes, "in the consensus of such judgments, all personal, but with an authority more than personal behind them, must be here the ultimate critical, as there the ultimate moral, criterion."<sup>1</sup>

The distinguishing feature, then, of Alice Meynell's critical method was that while it was founded upon certain clearly enunciated principles, it left room for "the sallies of impetuous courage," for the swift apprehension that is able to discern the essentially poetic, even when it fails to conform to hitherto accepted rules. This method of delicate sympathy with the aims of the author was, she believed, a method that would minimize injustice to the writer, especially if the critic was one who had preserved "rectitude of intellect, sincerity of heart, dignity of nerves, unhurried thoughts, an unexcited heart, and an ardour for poetry."<sup>2</sup> In the following chapter we shall see how, in her literary appraisals, Alice Meynell exemplified her own ideal of a critic as one who possessed not only precision but "its rare companions--liberty, flight, height, courage, a sense of space and a sense of closeness, readiness for spiritual experience, and all the gravity, all the resolution, of the lonely reader of a lonely poet."<sup>3</sup>

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1. "A New Anthology," *Academy*, November 13, 1897., p. 391.
  2. "The Lyrical Poetry of Swinburne," *Hearts of Controversy*, p. 71.
  3. "Coventry Patmore," Second Person Singular, p. 94.

## CHAPTER III

## PRACTICAL CRITICISM

The search for Alice Maynell's critical writings leads one through the files of most of the important periodicals of her time. Perhaps her most sustained contribution was to the Pall Mall Gazette in the days of the editorship of Harry Cust and Sir Douglas Straight. One of the daily features of this paper was the "Wares of Autolycus" column, named after Shakespeare's "snapper up of unconsidered trifles." Among the contributors to this section were Alice Maynell, Violet Hunt, Graham Tomson, Lady Colin Campbell, Elizabeth Robins Pennell, and, in later years, Katherine Tynan and Vernon Lee. Each of the writers was represented in a weekly column, and, to the modern reader, it is interesting to note how the tastes of the authors varied. Next to Mrs. Maynell's, perhaps the most interesting contribution was made by Elizabeth Robins Pennell, who, if one is to judge by her articles, was something of a gourmet, and whose essays were republished by John Lane under the engaging and appropriate title, Feasts of Autolycus.

Fortunately, the editors left the selection of topics to the writers themselves, and Alice Maynell, whose tastes were distinctly literary, delighted her readers with many piquant discussions of mooted questions in literature. Not all of her "Autolycus" columns dealt with criticism, however. Many of the essays were of the descriptively impressionistic



type which the readers of the nineties found so engaging. The student, searching for purely critical material, turns with reluctance from such charming pieces as "The Village at Night," "Fruit Trees in Bloom," and the whole series on color---"Red," "Grey," "White," "Yellow," "Blue." But in the field of criticism one is equally rewarded. There one finds illuminating essays on such diverse subjects as Christina Rossetti, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jean Ingelow, Edgar Allan Poe, and a large group of seventeenth century writers including Drummond of Hawthornden, Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughan, Richard Lovelace, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Crashaw--to mention only a few of the writers whose works are studied analytically in these pages. Indeed, Mrs. Meynell's contribution to the Pall Mall Gazette was an extended one. Her first column appeared on Friday, June 2, 1893, and she wrote a Friday column each week until March 25, 1896. From that date she wrote the Wednesday column, until December 28, 1896. The Autolyous series being then discontinued, her articles signed with her initials, "A.M.", were a weekly feature until October 21, 1899. After the death of R.A.M. Stevenson in 1900, the office of art critic for the Gazette was entrusted to Mrs. Meynell, and she remained with the paper in that capacity, signing her reviews, until June 20, 1905.

But Mrs. Meynell's literary work was by no means limited to the Pall Mall Gazette. Another contribution of almost equal scope was to Merry England, a monthly magazine founded and edited by her husband,

Wilfred Meynell. Her articles, covering a period of twelve years, may be traced through the full issue of the magazine, from the first number, appearing in October, 1883, to the last, in March, 1896. As in the Pall Mall Gazette, Mrs. Meynell treats a great variety of subjects. Among her most interesting articles are those on George Meredith, Aubrey de Vere, Charles Reade, Anthony Trollope, and, among the artists, Carolus Duran, Sir Frederick Leighton, Edward Bruce-Jones, George Clausen, and James McNeill Whistler.

Equally interesting from the standpoint of art criticism were the frequent reviews that appeared in a London publication, the Tablet. In 1876, at the editor's request, Mrs. Meynell had submitted an art review, thus beginning a series of articles that was to continue almost until her death. Her chief contribution to the Tablet, however, was a body of art criticism which she published at frequent intervals during the nine years between 1888 and 1897. Here one finds discussions of the work of John Singer Sargent, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edwin A. Abbey, Camille Corot, Daubigny, Jules Dupré---and a score of others whose work will be discussed in chapter three.

Other magazines, too, were eager to secure her services. For a number of years she contributed frequent articles to the Art Journal and to the Magazine of Art, sometimes under her own name and sometimes under the nom-de-plume of Alice Oldcastle. She wrote likewise, in later years, for the National Observer, the London Mercury, the Dublin Review, indeed, there were few of the leading magazines to which she did not

contribute at some time or other. Only to the Yellow Book did she refuse her services, and that in spite of an "inducing note" from its editor Henry Harland: "I wish I could persuade you to become a contributor to the Yellow Book," he wrote, "I think I have heard that your feeling for that periodical is not one of unbounded enthusiasm--raison de plus why you should lend a hand to the bettering of it. Won't you do us one of your exquisite essays?" But she was adamant in her refusal. After her visit to America in 1901, her reading public was still further increased; and for some years she contributed to such outstanding American periodicals as Harper's, the North American Review, the Atlantic Monthly, the Catholic World, and the Delineator.

The search for these "lost" articles is today something of a literary adventure, and the seeker is amply rewarded by the richness of the find. Of particular interest is her criticism of the seventeenth century, that century when "English had but to speak in order to say something exquisite. She regretted the obscurity to which the poets of that age had for so long been consigned, and complained that there had been "a breeze somehow withheld from whole fleets of poems that would have gone around the world."<sup>1</sup> This neglect of authentic poetry was, she believed, largely the fault of the critic. "In the last century, and for some time of the present," she wrote, "the critics had a wintry word to blame them with; they said of George Herbert, of Lovelace, of Crashaw, and of other light

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1. "My Lovelace," Pall Mall Gazette, March 31, 1897.

parts of the great seventeenth century---not so much that their inspiration was in bad taste, as that no reader of taste could suffer them. They alluded to this as a truth secure from question, and they knew the influential effect of such light allusion on the timorous reader."<sup>1</sup> She herself did all in her power to undo the regrettable results of such ill-timed criticism. "A better opinion on the men of the seventeenth century," she averred, "is that they had a taste extraordinarily liberal, generous, and elastic, but not essentially lax: taste that gave now and then too much room to play, but anon closed with the purest and most exact laws of temperance and measure."<sup>2</sup>

"It seems strange, now," says Viola Meynell, "that praise of the seventeenth century poets should then have been a thing of originality and independence."<sup>3</sup> Yet so it was. The modern reader is quite likely to forget how important was the part played by Mrs. Meynell in reviving an interest in the long-neglected literature of that century. In her widely circulated Fall Mall articles, in her various Prefaces, in her Anthologies, and in her public lectures she championed the cause of these "beset" poets with a persuasiveness that finally won for them an interested and delighted public.

It was the vital spirit of the seventeenth century that so charmed her, as well as the "abundant nature in that splendid time;" for, amid

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1. "Fair and Flagrant Things," Fall Mall Gazette, April 14, 1897.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Viola Meynell, op. cit., p. 206.

the "concoits" which the playful and impassioned poets practiced with all ingenuity and artifice, there was, she felt, "a wild sweetness of nature-- something wilder and more natural, more rapturous and unrestrained than the spirit of the simpler Elizabethans."<sup>1</sup> She showed the distinction between the two centuries in a memorable phrase: "Elizabethan poetry," she wrote, "is the apple-blossom fine and fragrant; the seventeenth century is the apple, fragrant and rich."<sup>2</sup> Thus the change from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth was a process, a slow ripening: "The Elizabethan genius changed slowly and did not die....If we take Cowley, Crashaw, Vaughan, Lovelace, and the Milton of "Lycidas" as purely and entirely seventeenth century poets we find the difference between them and Donne, between them and Ben Jonson. Herrick has the Elizabethan freshness in his "Corinna's Going a-Maying," but in the sudden lovely phrase, "Rise and put on your foliage," he is seventeenth century. That phrase is something richer. It is the rich quality that is so distinctive of this later age." Rich grew over-sweet and over-mellow now and then, in Crashaw's exquisite verse, she admitted, "the beauty grew to a too-conscious glory. 'Fair and fragrant things'---Crashaw's own brilliant phrase describes the bright excess of this wonderful poetry. But readers have been too much afraid of the 'concoits' of that age, and critics have been too much shocked. The concoits are almost all perfectly poetical and are rapturous in spite of artifice."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Introduction to A Seventeenth Century Anthology, p. iii.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Perhaps her favorite among the seventeenth century poets was Richard Lovelace; "my Lovelace," she called him, and wrote of the slender volume of his poems: "Lovelace who loved freedom seems to be enclosed in so narrow a book; yet it is but a 'hermitage'. To shake out the light and spirit of its leaves is to give a glimpse of liberty not to him, but to the world." Although for the most part he was long neglected, at least two of his lyrics---"When Love with Unconfined Wings," and "Tell Me Not, Sweet, I am Unkind"----"have never for any year," she says, "quite ceased to beat and live, to clap wings and to fly. Surely they were not suffered to fall still even in the time of Collins or Gray, nor silent even in the day of Addison. Even in the time of Byron they flew. They were never folded long."<sup>1</sup>

She assures her readers that the conceits of Lovelace are not to be dreaded. True, she admits, they are now and then daunting as in the poem on "Princess Louisa Drawing" which is a maze: "The little paths of verse and fancy turn in upon one another, and the turns are pointed with artificial shouts of joy and surprise."<sup>2</sup> Yet this poem is not to be regarded as characteristic of Lovelace's best manner, for, in the majority of his works, those figures of speech that a reader unused to a certain living symbolism may take for careful and cold conceits are in truth raptures---"none graver, none more fiery, or more luminous."

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1. "My Lovelace," Pall Mall Gazette, March 31, 1897.

2. Ibid.

Yet she admitted that (with the exception of the two or three best poems) Lovelace was not easy reading at any time:

The age he adorned lived in constant readiness for the fiddler. Eleven o'clock in the morning was a good an hour as another for a dance, and poetry, too, was gay betimes, but intricate with figures. It is the very order, the perspective as it were, of the movement that seems to baffle the eye, but the game was a free impulse. Since the first day danced with the first night, no dancing was more natural--at least to a dancer of genius.<sup>1</sup>

True, the dance could be tyrannous, for it was an importunate fashion, and here and there might be found a seventeenth century author "whose original seriousness or workaday piety would have been content to go plodding flat-foot or halting, as the muse might naturally incline with him, but whom the tune, the grace and gallantry of the time beckoned to tread a perpetual measure." Such was not true of Lovelace, however; he was not constrained to keep time to rhythms he could not feel, rather--to continue the figure--he himself led the dance. "Lovelace was a dancer of genius; nay, he danced to rest his wings, for he was winged, cap and heel."<sup>2</sup>

The poems of Richard Crashaw, too, found in Alice Mayne a responsive reader. "Fair and flagrant things"--Crashaw's own phrase--might, she said, serve as an excellent description both in praise and in protest of Crashaw's poems. She granted the charge of extravagance so often brought against him, yet she extenuated him:

The extravagance of Crashaw is a far more lawful thing than the extravagance of Addison whom some believe to have committed none; moreover, Pope and all the politer poets nursed something they were pleased to call a 'rage' and this they expatiated (to use another word of their own) beyond all bounds. Of sheer voluntary extremes it is not in the seventeenth

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

century conceit that we should seek examples, but in an eighteenth century 'rage'. A 'noble rage' properly provoked could be backed to write more trash than fancy ever tempted the half-incredulous sweet poet of the older time to run upon.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the eighteenth century conceits, though flagrant, were never fair.

"But fair indeed," writes Mrs. Maynard, "were Crashaw's, and fairer far the things that were not flagrant, but just, buoyant, balanced, saphyr-gentle, spring-fresh, impulsive, frolic, and free in his radiant poetry."<sup>2</sup>

Like Lovelace, Crashaw long suffered unmerited neglect. True, everyone was familiar with his "Wishes to His Supposed Mistress," the frequently quoted close to the "Flaming Heart," and perhaps with "Music's Duel," yet, she protested, great numbers of readers who knew the Elizabethans well enough, had too long denied themselves the happiness of taking Crashaw's own book into their hands, or, having opened it, were perhaps discouraged by the long conceits of "The Weeper." Yet even here, she observes, if tediousness could be gay, one would venture to say of the tediousness of "The Weeper" that it is so. She grants that it is easy enough to complain of the ingenuities of these stanzas, easy enough for the handbooks of literature to use the poem as a warning, yet, in the last analysis, the reader will find that "its follies are all sweet-humored; they allure and smile. Its beauties are a quick and abundant shower. The delicate phrases are so mingled with the flagrant that it is difficult to quote them without rousing that general sense of humor of

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1. "Fair and Flagrant Things," Pall Mall Gazette, April 14, 1897.

2. Ibid.



which anyone may make a boast."<sup>1</sup> With some reluctance, therefore, she points out a few of the more charming passages of the poem--the "brisk cherub" who has early sipped of the Saint's tear; the personification of Sorrow as a queen, who, when she would be seen in state, is, Crashaw assures the weeper, "dressed by none but thee;" and the fancy. "Fountain and garden in one face," which Alice Maymell feels outdoes Camplon with his "Cherry Ripe."

But, as she points out, if these charming passages are to be found in his worst poem, "the best poems overflow. Take the 'Quem Vidiatis Pastores?' Hardly a stanza of this shepherd's hymn of the Nativity has not a line or two to learn by heart:"

The Babe looked up and showed His face;  
In spite of darkness: it was day.  
It was Thy day, Sweet, and did rise  
Not from the east, but from Thine eyes.<sup>2</sup>

Equally felicitous did she find the "Epiphany Hymn" in which the heavens have found means

To disinherit the sun's rise,  
Delicately to displace  
The day and plant it fairer in thy face.

Likewise, she looked upon "To the Morning: Satisfaction for Sleep," as luminous verse: "It would be difficult to find, even in the orient poetry of that time more daylight or more spirit."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

"On a Prayer-Book sent to Mrs. M. R.," was, in her estimation, the richest of the poems. She believed that although an Elizabethan would not have had it so rich, he would have had it no fresher. In the brevities of "Hymn to Saint Teresa" she found a reply to those critics who reproach Crashaw with his longeurs; and of many contemporary songs in pursuit of a fugitive Cupid, she looked upon Crashaw's "Cupid's Cryer: Out of the Greek" as the most charming. But there were profounder moments in Crashaw: "If any readers, a little vexed with the poet's light heart and perpetual pleasure, with the late ripeness of his sweetness should begin to listen for another note," says Mrs. Meynell, "here, for their satisfaction, is a passage sounding of the great age that had lately closed when Crashaw wrote. It is his summons to nature and art:"

Come and come strong  
To the conspiracy of our spacious song.<sup>1</sup>

Abraham Cowley, Crashaw's friend, answered this summons, and found in the art and character of his friend inspiration for one of his greatest odes, that "On the Death of Mr. Crashaw." Here, at last, says Mrs. Meynell, Cowley is tender. But the mood was unusual to him. For the most part he was cold though he attempted to adopt the warm language of his contemporaries:

Cowley the cold wrote in a gay language, but contributed nothing to its gayety. His contemporaries or immediate predecessors had 'touched the tender stops of various quills,' and their ringing instrument he took into his steady, emphatic, and never very jocund hands. He would have done as

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1. Ibid.

well or better with notes less various or less nimble. He was not without his own effect in the poetic career of England...but that effect was in versification, not in diction. 'He unhappily adopted,' says Dr. Johnson, 'that which was predominant.' 'That which was predominant' was as good as the cycles of seasons have ever brought to pass. But it was not yet ready for a cold poet---in that Johnson was right.<sup>1</sup>

Yet she finds in Cowley's poetry such occasional delicately imaginative passages, as occur in the lines

The violet, Spring's little infant, stands  
Girt in the purple swadling bands.

But such touches are infrequent. For the most part, even in his love poems, Cowley "left the language cooler than he found it." "What the conceits of Lovelace and the rest--flagrant, not frigid--did not do," says Mrs. Meynell, "was done by Cowley's quenching breath; the language of love began to lose by him. But even then, who could have foretold what the loss at last would be!"<sup>2</sup>

Another seventeenth century poet whose works Mrs. Meynell read with appreciation was Andrew Marvell. The fact that an anonymous biographer had conferred upon him the sobriquet of the "British Aristides" should not, she asserted, deter the reader from making Marvell's acquaintance: "The partly dulness of the mind that could make such a phrase, and having made it, award it, is not, in fairness, to affect a reader's thought of Marvell himself or even of his time....He doubtless has moments of mediocre pomp, but even then it is Milton that he touches, and not any -

1. "Abraham Cowley," Full Mall Gazette, April 28, 1897.

2. Ibid.

thing more common."<sup>1</sup> True, Marvell's political rectitude seems to have been of a robustious kind, but his poetry as its rare best, has a "wild civility" which might puzzle the biographer who made a success of the appellation, "the British Aristides." "May," she continues, "it is difficult not to imagine that Marvell, too, who was 'of a middling stature, roundish-faced, cherry checked,' a healthy and active rather than a spiritual Aristides, might be surprised at the encounters of so subtle a muse. He, as a garden poet, expected the accustomed Muse to lurk about the fountain-heads, within the caves, and by the walks and statues of the gods, keeping the tryst of a seventeenth century convention in which there were certainly no surprises."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, a fear of the commonplace sometimes caused Marvell to abandon his simplicity and to so belabour his fancy as to outdo the whole company of garden poets, forcing his reader into a labyrinth deliberately intricate, and obliging him more than once "to turn back having been too much puzzled on the way to a small, visible, plain, and obvious goal of thought."<sup>3</sup> When he is in such a mood, Mrs. Maynell thinks him tedious indeed---"tedious with every ingenuity, refinement, and assiduity of invention." Thus, when he writes such a poem as the "Hill and Grove at Billborow" for no more serious reason than to flatter its owner, Lord Fairfax, she finds Marvell "most deliberately silly." Yet for the poet

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1. "Andrew Marvell," Pall Mall Gazette, July 14, 1897.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

there is a saving grace in the fact that even in his artificiality there is a "peculiar innocence." "Unconsciousness there was not, assuredly, but the artificial phrases of Marvell had never been used by a Philistine; the artifices are freshly absurd, the cowardice before the plain face of commonplace is not vulgar, there is an evident simple pleasure in the evasion of simplicity, and all the anxiety of the poet comes to a happy issue before our eyes."<sup>1</sup> Even so, the poem is not saved from such absurdities as occur in the passages in which the poet commends Billbore Hill because "the stiffest compass could not strike" a more symmetrical and equal semicircle than its form presents; or when he rebukes the absent mountains because they deform the earth and affright the heavens, while the hill only strives to rise above the plain; or when he commends Lord Fairfax for the modesty whereby, having a hill, he has also a clump of trees on the top wherein to sequester the honors of eminence. "It is not too much," writes Mrs. Maynell, "to say that the whole of this poem is untouched by poetry."<sup>2</sup>

But Marvell was not always inspired by so pedestrian a Muse. There were times when his imagination, transcending the poetic conventions of his day, and "casting the body's vest aside," could take wings and glide among the boughs where

....like a bird it sits and sings  
Then whets and overlaps its silver wings.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Andrew Marvell, "The Garden."

This was the Marvell that Mrs. Maynell admired:

And yet this poet, two or three times did meet a Muse he had hardly looked for among the trodden paths: a spiritual creature had been waiting behind an apple or a laurel tree. You find him coming away from such a divine ambush a wilder and a simpler man. All his garden had been made ready for poetry, and poetry was indeed there, but in unexpected hiding and in a strange form, looking rather like a fugitive, shy of the poet who was conscious of having her rules by heart, yet sweetly willing to be seen for all her haste.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of "a furtive irony of the sweetest kind," says Mrs. Maynell, is the sure sign of the visit of this infrequent Muse. Thus the spirit and subtlety of "The Picture of T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers," is the result of one of these unlocked-for visitations, and, in the series of his garden lyrics, it is only in those well-known poems, "The Garden," translated from his own Latin, "The Nymph Complaining of the Death of Her Fawn," "The Mower Against Gardens," and a few passages in the course of duller verses that Marvell "comes into veritable possession of his own more interior powers." The "noble phrase" of the "Horatian Ode" too, has the accent of authentic poetry, as has "The Definition of Love" with its "single splendid and surpassing passage:"

Magnanimous despair alone  
Could show me so divine a thing,

and its impressively simple close:

Therefore the love which us doth bind,  
But fate so enviously debars,  
In the conjunction of the mind,  
And opposition of the stars.

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1. "Andrew Marvell," op. cit.

But if Marvell met his Muse infrequently, and even then approached her through rings of dancing fauns and dryads, a new note in Nature poetry was sounded when Henry Vaughan, "the first of our true poets who looked at nature with the full spiritual intellect," began to write. His poetry was unique because it presented nature unattended by the mythical denizens of the traditional pastoral:

Nature herself, alone, the very nature, swept of fairies, clear of nymphs and sylphs, pastures from which the feigned shepherds of his own century had all passed piping away, woods left to the birds, hills left to the sunrises, streams left to their own voices, fields left to the husband-men--over these ranged his imagination of awful sincerity, facing day and night alone. Imagination, surely, is not at its greatest until it passes beyond imagery, whither truth is simple and poetry bare, and Vaughan had glimpses of that vital country.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason Mrs. Keynall felt that lovers of poetry had suffered a great privation because of their long neglect of Vaughan, "His name, his genius, with all this significance, the touch and test of the age, went by so little heeded that the general ignorance of 1695 had almost lasted until now."<sup>2</sup>

She acknowledged Vaughan's debt to Herbert, a debt that often led Vaughan to a verbal imitation of the older poet, so that at times he caught "little flocks of phrases in his net as they alighted." And she contrasted the two poets, to the advantage of the younger: "Vaughan falls many times below the beauty, the wit, the tenderness and intimacy that never failed Herbert, but he had the wilder imagination and the more

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1. "Henry Vaughan," Pall Mall Gazette, September 8, 1897.

2. Ibid.

tragic sense, the wider spiritual day and the profounder night. His thoughts are full of the images of light and darkness, but it is for a deeper cause than this that his poetry seems luminous...Vaughan was a mysterious poet, and the light of visions streams from his page as from that of Coleridge."<sup>1</sup>

Despite his occasional lapses into flatness and rapidity, Vaughan's poems possessed "a longer movement, more clarity, more freshness, more height, and more future," than were to be found again for a century. "You may picture him," writes Mrs. Meynell, "standing single to keep the way open thither, standing to keep the sky open before overwhelming meanings should gather in and fasten near and far. There seems hardly a word, however slight, in some of his phrases, but seems to do this heroic work; hardly a word that is not an unheeded mystic. How strange was English poetry to choose his very day of revelations for her decision to make mediocrity her own!"<sup>2</sup>

But if Mrs. Meynell admired the rich and delicate poetry of the seventeenth century, she likewise found much to commend in the "fire and freshness" of the Elizabethans. Her criticism of the period is largely a criticism of its lyrics, yet frequent allusions in her works remind us that she was also thoroughly familiar with the dramas of the time. A favorite poet, of course, was Shakespeare, who, says Viola Meynell, "haunted her writing and her life." "We all know Shakespeare as it

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.



were privately," wrote Alice Maynell, "and thus words about him touch our autobiography." It is for this reason that her daughter asserts that a history of Mrs. Maynell's feeling for Shakespeare alone, if such a record could be made, "would not leave a great deal else of importance to say about her, so much was that feeling at the foundation of her existence."<sup>1</sup>

Thus in "Superfluous Kings" Mrs. Maynell laments the passing of kings "for no other reason than that in the future Shakespeare's use of royalty will mean less than it did:"

Our regrets in regard to him cover all his regalities--the hidden and hereditary and unconscious, and the conscious and braggart and manifest: Perdita's dignity among the romps, and her sportive disputes as to Art and Nature among the clowns, her unflushed composure amid the joustings, and also Lear's loud and indignant death.<sup>2</sup>

It is this resolute act of belief in the blood of kings which enables Shakespeare to confront the reader with the ultimate majesty of the royalty he depicts; it is this which "brings us to our knees before the arrogant splendor he conceives:"

Where souls do couch on flowers we'll  
hand in hand,  
And with our sprightly port make the  
ghost gaze.

Here says Mrs. Maynell, is "the pride of life and the pride of death. Only hand in hand with a queen does Antony venture on the prophecy of that immortal vanity. If to him are given the most surprising lines in any of the tragedies, it is only as the lover of a queen that he had the

1. Viola Maynell, Alice Maynell, p. 203

2. "Superfluous Kings," Second Person Singular, pp. 7-8.

right to them. To him is assigned that startling word, the incomparable word of amorous and tender ceremony---'Egypt.'

I am dying, Egypt, dying.

That territorial name, murmured to his love in the hour of death, and in her arms--I know not in the records of all genius any other such august farewell."<sup>1</sup>

Even in his most ironical lines, Shakespeare never loses sight of the dignity of royalty:

Which had superfluous kings for messengers  
Not many moons gone by

is an antithesis which, in reversal implies the splendor and majesty of the state from which those rulers had fallen: "Superfluous kings--- Shakespeare's irony could find no other adjective so overcharged with insolence as this. Kings must be as great as he conceived them for that antithesis."<sup>2</sup>

Still another indication of her continued interest in Shakespeare is shown in her stanzas "To Shakespeare," written in 1916 and commemorating the two Shakespeare tercentenaries, that of his birth in 1664, and that of his death, in 1716. The realization that her own lifetime (she was born in 1850) stretched before and after his, was the inspiration for a poem whose subtle thought is presented with a lucid simplicity of statement:

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1. "Superfluous Kings," op. cit. p. 9.

2. Ibid.

Thy unprophectic birth,  
Thy darkling death: Living I might have seen  
That cradle, marked those labours, closed that earth.  
O first, O last, O infinite between!

Now that my life has shared  
Thy dedicated date, O mortal, twice,  
To what all-vain embrace shall be compared  
My lean enclosure of thy paradise:

To ignorant arms that fold  
A poet to a foolish breast? The line,  
That is not, with the world within its hold?  
So, days with days, my days encompass thine.

Child, Stripling, Man---the sod.  
Might I talk little language to thee, pore  
On thy last silence? O thou city of God,  
My waste lies after thee and lies before.<sup>1</sup>

But while Shakespeare dominated Elizabethan literature, other writers, though not so great, were hardly less interesting. She looked upon Robert Greene, for example, as a typical Elizabethan---Greene who was born in the year of Elizabeth's accession to the throne, and who "died while she was dancing." Though there was much to regret in Greene's life, there was nothing, says Mrs. Maynell, that needed retraction in his songs "sweet and single, like tunes unharmonized." In Greene she saw a typical sixteenth century poet: "Without following the fashion of using the terms of one art to describe another," she says, "we may permit ourselves this mere imagery: the single note of music to represent the sixteenth century lyric, harmonics for the seventeenth, counterpoint for the nineteenth."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "To Shakespeare," The Poems of Alice Maynell, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> "Strictly an Elizabethan Lyrist," Second Person Singular, p. 13.

Yet she felt that it was not human to be single as the lyrics of Greene were single; for each of his themes--the happy lot of the shepherd, the musing on love, the troubles of royalty---"is so unaccompanied that you wonder how even a primitive poet should have had time to reject all checking, mingling, and qualifying thoughts together. For it is hardly youth, hardly inexperience that this simplicity suggests, but rather a mind made up, a mind bent on creating other conditions than those which govern an actual world of which the poet has somewhat grown tired."<sup>1</sup>

However, Greene's poetic technique was careless, and this possibly because the stanzas were written, not for their own sakes, but as snatches of songs in his more sustained compositions. Even so, there are moments when his versification is very good indeed as in "Radagon in Dianan" where "the foot is elastic and moves with a rebound." In the lesser poems his verse is given lightly to the wind: "He has the lightest feet, and seems rather to whistle than to sing his tunes upon the way."<sup>2</sup>

But while Mrs. Meynell detects in Greene a lack of that intellectual quality which makes for grave and masculine poetry, he was nevertheless fortunate in having for his use a language that was mobile, tuned by the hands of masters. If his nymphs, his fountains, and his valleys later became the trappings of a wearisome convention, at least he possessed the merit of having been one of the first to use them: "Robert Greene was a

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1. Ibid., p. 14.

2. Ibid., p. 16.

small poet among the minor poets; but his hour struck in the cool of the morning, and whatever kind of simplicity was in his mind, the authentic simplicity was in his English."<sup>1</sup>

Another minor writer of the period who two or three times managed to produce felicitous poetry was Thomas Campion, a poet who denied himself the place he should have held in virtue of his many talents, because he was content "to deliver up the numbers of his verses to the time of tunes--habitually to give up his own poetic rhythm to the tyranny of an alien measure."<sup>2</sup> Thus for Campion, the song writer, the constraint of "airs" played havoc with what would have been a most delicate genius. "That he was abandoned for three centuries," says Mrs. Keynall, "is poetry's revenge upon the poet who was too willing to hear his moving lines pausing and flying upon a movement that was not their own---caught away as a rhythmic bird on the wing is caught by the wind."<sup>3</sup>

She finds it easy to divide the poems written for the sake of "airs" from those written for the sake of poetry. In the first she detects monotony of fancy, dullness of metre, extraordinary weakness of some second and third stanzas. "And yet," she says, "Campion began again and again with the onset of a poet." To justify this statement she cites a number of beautiful first lines such as

Sleep, angry beauty, sleep and fear not me,

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1. Ibid., p. 17.

2. "Thomas Campion," Fall Mall Gazette, June 2, 1897.

3. Ibid.

and

Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow,

which, after the vitality of their openings relapses into the dullest kind of reasoning. An example of what Campion might have done in the art of metre had he not harnessed Pegasus, is shown in the "incomparable fluctuation" of the first stanza of one of the poems from the third Book of Airs:

Kind are her answers  
But her performance keeps no day;  
Breaks time as dancers  
From their own music when they stray.

But the next stanza is quite poor "because the same peculiar metre, enchanting for the dance with its flux and reflux, trochaic and iambic movements swinging against one another, is moralizing, and the measure ceases to be fine. There cannot, therefore," she concludes, "be a more representative bit of Campion."<sup>1</sup>

Campion's best poem, in Mrs. Maynell's estimation is "When Thou Must Home" which sustains its excellence even after the greatness of its opening:

When thou must home to shades of underground,  
And there arrived, a new admired guest---

The lines are "as solemn and fantastic at the close as at this dark and splendid opening, and throughout, past description, Elizabethan. This

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1. Ibid.

single poem," she asserts, "must bind Campion to that period without a question; and as he lived thirty-six years in the actual reign of Elizabeth, and printed his Book of Airs with Rosseter two years before her death, it is by no violence that we give him the name that covers the earlier poets of the great age. 'When Thou Must Home' is of the day of Marlowe. It has the qualities of great poetry, and especially the quality of keeping its simplicity; and it has a quality of great simplicity not at all child-like, but adult, large, gay, credulous, tragic, sombre, and amorous."

Another Elizabethan whose lyrics Mrs. Maynell discusses, but with some reserves, is Ben Jonson. She does not place him in the first rank of lyric writers, regarding him, rather, as "a wanton mathematician of the fancy." Her first criticism is for the triteness of his too-frequent theme which is "the shortness of love and the better bargain driven by those who make haste to love." "The poets," she observes, "had nothing higher than this sorry thing to say of their own spirits, nothing graver of time, and nothing better of love. This economy was the burden of that song of essentially cold impatience---that thrifty but futile song---and they were not reluctant to use their own youth in the dull calculation that turned so many acres of commercial lines. Everything was valued in the illiberal, eager, and untender reckoning which Petrarch in a day of greater dignity might have rebuked."<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Ben Jonson As a Lyrist," Fall Mall Gazette, August 4, 1897.

Likewise, according to Mrs. Maynard, it is in only a very few of the lyrics that Ben Jonson attains to high or significant music, despite the fact that he is scrupulously smooth and that his poems are written with more attention to quantity and accent than many poets have given. Among his best lyrics she ranks "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," "His Discourse with Cupid," "Her Triumph," and the ten songs called "A Celebration of Charis." In these poems she discovers such suddenly charming phrases as Love's "dark lantern face," or "your emissary eye," but even so, she insists, Cupid, the "old boy" of a line of Ben Jonson's, lacks the rapture that Christopher Marlowe captures in one phrase of genius--"his childish cheek." "Obviously," she declared, "it is freshness that Ben Jonson lacks, for all his vigor, his emphatic initiative, and his overbearing and impulsive voice in verse. There is a stale breath in that hearty shout."<sup>1</sup>

Jonson's friend, William Drummond of Hawthornden fared but little better in her criticism. All of Drummond's poems, she says, even at their finest, are minor poems, save only the ode, "Phoebus arissi" and the sonnet, "Sleep Silence' Child." "Almost all his other poems," she avers, "are marred by the vice of concluding couplets in which the author's fancy has failed to answer the little stimulating call for epigram or antithesis. In fact the concluding couplet---and that a weak one---is an obsession with Drummond. It was an Elizabethan trap generally, but it catches few poets tripping at the complacent moment of the final attitude and smile so often as it catches him."<sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid.

2. "Drummond of Hawthornden," Pall Mall Gazette, May 26, 1897.



Yet she finds in Drummond's poems many felicitous images!

We have the first perceived, and here a morn  
Of bright carnations overspread her face,

possesses, says Mrs. Maynell, a freshness that no custom of aftertime can wither. likewise, "A hyacinth I wished me in her hand," "is another of the phrases that are themselves fresher than flowers, and when he has "aspen stalks" the words are mobile and cold."<sup>1</sup>

Yet Drummond is not a simple poet except with the less creditable simplicity that a poet must have who divides his poems thus: "Amorous, Funerall, Divine, Pastorall," and "punctually fulfills each department, setting appropriate madrigals and songs among the unwearied sonnets." In these poems Drummond whips and pricks his fancy, especially in those divisions labelled "Amorous" and "Pastorall." "Here," says Mrs. Maynell "the poor fancy is allowed little rest, and when the moment of rare repose occurs, it is as pleasant as when a restless summer wind ceases to blow upon the already well-enkindled fires of the sunny day, and lets the lights of trees and waters flame awhile in quiet."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the marked individuality of the Elizabethan lyrics, at least one of their creations became a convention--and this was "the lady of the lyrics." "The sixteenth century," says Mrs. Maynell, "took her for granted as the object of song; she was a class, a sex. It was scarcely necessary to waste the lyricist's time--time that went so gaily to metre as

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

not to brook delays---in making her out too clearly. She had no more of what later times call individuality than had the rose, her rival, her foil when she was kinder, her superior when she was cruel, her ever fresh and ever conventional paragon."<sup>1</sup>

The chief traits of the lady of the lyrics are readily discernible: her pride in her beauty was so great that "she could not bring herself to perceive the shortness of her day;" "she was so unobservant as to need to be told that life is brief, and youth briefer than life, and that the rose fades;" her fancy was fickle; she was not moved by long service; she flaunted her poet. "We need not assume," says Mrs. Maynell, "that the lady of the lyrics ever lived. But taking her as the perfectly unanimous conception of the lyrists, how is it that she did not discover these things unaided? Why does the lover invariably imagine her with a mind intensely irritated under his own praise and poetry?"<sup>2</sup>

The answer, she believes, is that music is chiefly responsible, since the lyrics dedicated to the "lady" are generally written as "words for music." This fact accounts for the general spirit of such poetry, for, since the music was ingenious, the words must have an air of epigram and a clearly defined limit: "So, too, the lady of the lyrics, who might be called the lady of the stanzas, so strictly does she go by measure. When she is quarrelsome it is but fugishness; when she dances she does it by a saxon. She could not but be perverse, merrily sung to such

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1. "The Lady of the Lyrics," The Spirit of Place, p. 23.

2. Ibid., p. 25.

grave notes."<sup>1</sup>

But the lady of the lyrics found no place in the more complex<sup>2</sup> poetry of later ages:

Fair as a lily, hard to please, easily angry, ungrateful for innumerable verses, uncertain with the regularity of the madrigal, and inconstant with the punctuality of a stanza, she has gone with the arts of that day; and neither verse nor music shall ever make such another lady. She refused to observe the transiency of roses; she never really intended--much as she was urged--to be a shepherdess; she was never persuaded to mitigate her dress. In return, the world has let her disappear. She scorned the poets until they turned upon her in the epigram of many a final couplet; and of these the last has long been written. Her 'no' was set to counterpoint in the part-song, and she frightened Love out of her sight in a ballet. Those occupations are gone, and the lovely Elizabethan has slipped away. She was something less than mortal.<sup>2</sup>

But if Mrs. Maynell regarded the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ---these two "singing centuries"---as the April and May of English literature, the eighteenth century was hardly its June. We have seen that she looked upon the change from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century as a process, a slow and gradual ripening, but the transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth she considered as little less than a catastrophe. "English letters did not suspect their own loss," she wrote; "all seemed gain, all seemed progress." Yet, "no two ages of English poetry are so unlike, so completely divided, so suddenly severed, as the seventeenth century and the eighteenth. The difference and the suddenness are the strangest of all facts in the history of our great literature.

1. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

2. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

The end of the seventeenth century drew in as the closing of a shutter and a sudden exclusion of the sky."<sup>1</sup> She conceded the sometimes "exceptional inspiration, the noble tenderness of Pope;" she granted that Cowper "was not saved from the passion of grief by measured Latinised diction, and was not rescued from despair by the heroic couplet;" she admitted that the age of the "Essay on Man" and the "Elegy" was an age of great wit and great poetry. Yet the century failed because it was not true to itself. "I think no other century has cherished so persistent a self-conscious incongruity," she writes. "As the century of good sense and good couplets it might have kept uncompromised the dignity we honor."<sup>2</sup> But the eighteenth century "was not content with its sure and certain genius. Suddenly and repeatedly it aspired to a 'noble rage.' It is not to the wild light hearts of the seventeenth century that we must look for extreme conceits and for extravagance, but to the later age, to the faultless, to the frigid, dissatisfied with their own propriety. There were straws, I confess, in the hair of the older poets; the eighteenth century stuck straws in its periwig."<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Augustan age, not content with a moderate mind, matched its "rage" with a flagrant diction "mingled of Latin words and simple English words made vacant and ridiculous." It was Addison whose hero "taught the doubtful battle where to rage," and later, Johnson, the temperate, summoned the absent and reluctant fury. "Look you," says Mrs. Maynell. "Johnson

1. Preface to A Seventeenth Century Anthology, p. iii.

2. "The Century of Moderation," Hearts of Controversy, p. 115.

3. Ibid., p. 110.

himself could lodge the fury in his responsible breast."

And dubious title shakes the madded land.

She asserts that there is no author of that century of moderation who does not thus more or less eat crocodile. It is not necessary to go to the bad poets for proof of this, we need go no further than the most celebrated of the age.

And gasping Furies thirst for blood in vain.

says Pope. Also,

There purple vengeance bathed in gore retires

And another example of eighteenth century "propriety:"

The hills forget they're fixed and in their fright  
Cast off their weight, and ease themselves for flight.  
The woods with terror winged out-fly the wind,  
And leave the heavy, panting hills behind.

It was such lines as these which led her to observe that the eighteenth century "invented the art of raving," and this because it was resolved to show the way, to fire the nations, to be behind no century in passion. Its forced vivacity led her to compare the century to the Bishop of Hereford who, in merry Barnsdale, danced in his boots; but, she reminds us, "he was coerced by Robin Hood."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 115.

But with the opening of the nineteenth century a new spirit was infused into English literature. Then the stream of the modern world began, as it were, to feel the tides: "So was the mind of the nineteenth century lifted and cradled, in suspense like the pause of a vehement heart; so did it tend to the past and set to the future, a tidal flux and influx that flew from the end, flowed from the goal, filled and brimmed the upper reaches, revisited pastures of yesterday with eager waves, or abbed with a run and made haste to leave them twice."<sup>1</sup>

In Keats she found an exponent of the new breath and spirit in literature--Keats whose best poetry "is contained in so small a space that a certain number of his readers know it all by heart." The sonnet on Chapman's Homer, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the "Ode to a Nightingale," the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "To Autumn," the "Ode on Melancholy," the "Ode to Psyche," some stanzas from "St. Agnes' Eve," a phrase or two from "Isabella," some passages from "Hyperion," two or three fine sonnets, and a passage or two from "Endymion"---in so brief a list are enumerated his best poems. "English literature," says Mrs. Maynell, "has in this little room 'infinite riches' indeed. To be without these immortal poems would be to have missed some singular glory of poetry." And this she feels is all the more remarkable, because Keats was hampered by the worst of tastes.

But Keats did not always achieve high poetry:

"Simple and sensuous"--part of a famous phrase--are words that describe the secondary poetry of Keats and the ideal that it suggests--a good custom

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1. "The Swan of Lichfield," Second Person Singular, p. 50.

corrupted--suited his worst mood only too well. The senses of Keats were not vigorous, but they were exceedingly luxurious and sensitive. If we could take the vulgar sense of the word passionate, that word must for ever be parted from the other two for the description of Keats. But using "passionate" to denote the onset rather of intellect than of instinct, Keats may be honored by that noble word. At his worst he is entirely non-intellectual and too sickly to be, in the vulgar sense, passionate. At his best he has the true passion of thought.<sup>1</sup>

The "Ode to a Nightingale," therefore, has simple but true thought, a dignity, a humanity, a tragedy that make it able to answer for itself. Likewise the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," though a poem of the fancy rather than of the imagination, is nevertheless a poem of the intellectual fancy, and shines brightly from its lower place. "It is," says Mrs. Maynell, "an irony of man, a mimicry of art, a mockery of time, a burlesque of place and space, a rallying of poetry all sweet and tender beyond description.... In this ode Keats is the simple or magical poet at his most direct and most remote, master of a muse that will be beckoned from far and will come, like light."

The evidence furnished by his finest poems convinced Mrs. Maynell that Keats, had his genius been allowed to develop further, would have been a poet of the intellectual imagination:

Doubtless Keats, beginning with the poor, unrelieved, unmanly sensuousness of "Endymion"--rightly matched with the worst and most unbraced couplets ever written--would have been, had he lived, a singularly, though simply, intellectual poet. His taste went wrong, apparently, under the

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1. Introduction to Poems by John Keats, London, Blackie and Sons, 1903, p. vi.

influence of such "poetry" as that of Leigh Hunt's " Rimini," and he improved much upon all the characteristics of this wretched model. Rising from all this "pulp"---he himself loves the word---he was yet able to strengthen his mind to such splendid action as that of these great Odes and the Chaucer sonnet. The feat is a great one."<sup>1</sup>

But if Keats, with time, might have become a poet of the intellectual imagination, the same could not be said of Coleridge, who, according to his contemporaries, was a man of intellect, "but a poet of intellect," says Mrs. Meynell, "They cannot persuade us to hold him, against the evidence. As a poet he seems to have been almost incapable of thought."<sup>2</sup> Thus, even the thought necessary for telling a consecutive story fails him, and in the "Ancient Mariner," for example, he is "foolish with a kind of culpable folly, a making havoc of those human faculties of reason and observation never to be so wasted without disaster."

But if Coleridge cannot be called a poet of the intellectual imagination, his claim to greatness is based upon a quality almost as rare: "His almost indescribable beauty," she asserts, "is that which no taking thought would have added to his verse. He had the exaltation of the senses which is the best thing that can befall a simple poet."<sup>3</sup> We have already noted that in the "Ancient Mariner" she found numerous examples of the exaltation of the senses expressed in various types of imagery--visual, auditory, tactile--in their most exquisite form. It is in such poetry that Coleridge

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1. Ibid., p. vii.

2. "The Ancient Mariner," Pall Mall Gazette, September 22, 1897.

3. Ibid.



is at his best:

There is nothing elsewhere in poetry like the pureness of this emotion; the beyond of dreams, the beyond of childhood, the beyond of slight delirium are there together. He takes the sun, the moon, and the stars as apparitions, as a dream takes them when a dream gives warning of a coming illness. From immeasurable hiding places he brings them hither in simple verse, and with them the very secrets of the senses, and with them, too, the secrets of the blood and of the flying breath in sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately the immediate successors of the Romantic poets did not inherit their spirit, though they tried vainly to imitate their verse forms. Thus Thomas Lovell Beddoes secured a kind of brief prominence because he wrote couplets to be like Keats, and lyrics to be like Shelley. Nevertheless, he was not without talent, says Mrs. Moynell, and deserves our cordial pity for living in a time when the inspiration of English poetry was withdrawn. "When for a far longer period this had happened before," she writes, "there had been no one living aware of the lapse, when Shelley and Keats were gone, Wordsworth and Coleridge at an end, Beddoes was aware of what had happened, and knew all the conditions in which his own life had come to pass. He may remind you of a poor rabbit that came to consciousness in the midst of a physiological experiment. Generally the anaesthetic lasts as long as the trouble. But Beddoes had the distress of being an Englishman during a pause of poetry that must have seemed a final loss to his solitary consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

It was Beddoes who described his now almost forgotten contemporary, George Darley, as violent, but this violence, such as it was, according

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1. *Ibid.*

2. "George Darley," Second Person Singular, p. 83.

to Mrs. Mayne, resulted chiefly from his selection of words intended to retrieve the language from the Teutonisms that were becoming so popular during his lifetime. But Darley's influence was not greatly felt, perhaps because "he was not always careful enough of the difference between scholarly Latinisms and those wherof a poet in his haste might not stop to taste the doubtful scholarship."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless his poetry had light and space in it, and he was not altogether unsuccessful in his imitation of the Elizabethan dramatists. Not to him, however, was the trust of English poetry committed; probably because the color of life was lacking to his poetry, for "no red, not even red veiled by the blond and tender colors of humanity, shines in Darley's verse."

"It would be better to be purely forgotten and then rediscovered (or not, as may befall,)" wrote Mrs. Mayne, "than to be half-remembered, or remembered by rumor, as Sidney Dobell seems to have been for many years, and to be compromised by the praises that send a straightforward reader shying and swerving to left or right---anywhere out of the way of their finger posts. Oblivion is clean, but not so the encumbered remembrance, and not so the reputation taken into custody and care by the Introductory Memoir."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Dobell deserved a somewhat better fate, for he was a lyrical poet's lyrical poet, and very often in his verse "the tide of impassioned feeling is a high tide that has lifted all the poet's blood."

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1. "George Darley," Second Person Singular, p. 83.

2. "Sidney Dobell," Second Person Singular, p. 87.

However, his two best known poems "The Army Surgeon" and "Home in War time," are not, says Mrs. Maynell, in the full sense of the word, great poems because "They have not the peace which seems, beyond all our understanding to make an eternal quality of poetry of the tumult of Lear. They are poems of emotional unrest, but among poems of emotional unrest they are singularly fine and true, and something at least of the fusing work of passion is done upon their beautiful diction."<sup>1</sup>

When Sidney Dobell published his Balder in 1854, Alfred Tennyson had already been poet laureate for four years. At that time no apology for Tennyson's poetry would have seemed necessary, and an attempt to defend his poetical methods would have appeared as a gratuitous undertaking to a public already convinced of the validity of his art. After Tennyson's death in 1892, however, a strong reaction occurred, and detraction of his work became almost as exaggerated as the former adulation had been. Today, when the pendulum of public appreciation is again beginning to swing toward the Victorian poet, it is well to remember that Mrs. Maynell was one of the first to brave the "paltry precipitancy of the multitude" that had brought about "a ferment and corruption of opinion on Tennyson's poetry." She had small sympathy with the tendency, even of educated opinion, that at one time had been disposed to accept the whole of Tennyson's poetry as though he could not be "parted from himself," and later became disposed to reject the whole on the same plea. The more judicious attitude, as she points out, is to realize that Tennyson had "both a style and a manner: a

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1. Ibid., p. 90.

masterly style, a magical style, a too dauntless manner, nearly a trick; a noble landscape and in it figures something readymade."<sup>1</sup> It is his inconsistency of method which in one verse makes a reader admire and wonder, and in another makes him grow indifferent or slightly averse. "He is a subject for our alternatives of feeling, nay, our conflicts," she writes, "as is hardly another poet." Thus, he sheds "the luminous sums of dreams" upon men and women whose artificiality seems to be more suited to footlights; and through "long gray fields, cool sombre summers, and meadows thronged with unnoticeable flowers" he leads---"a carpet knight." Mrs. Keynell admits all this; she acknowledges "his bygone taste, his insipid courtliness, his prettiness...his slightly falsetto note when he intends to sing his manliest," yet she feels that all this is overbalanced by his great style, his "imagination which needs no imagery" but sees the thing with so luminous a mind's eye, that it is sufficient to him; he needs not to see it more beautifully by a similitude." Thus in the lines:

On one side lay the ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full

she finds Tennyson at his best: "Here is no taint of manner, no pretty posture of habit, but the simplicity of poetry and the simplicity of nature, something on the yonder side of imagery."<sup>2</sup>

She dares to call him one of the fountain-head poets of the world, and that because "his was a new apprehension of nature, an increase in the number, and not only in the sum, of our national apprehensions of

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1. "Some Thoughts of a Reader of Tennyson," Hearts of Controversy, p. 2.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

poetry in nature. Unaware of a separate angel of modern poetry is he who is insensible to the Tennyson note--the new note that we reaffirm even with the notes of Vaughan, Traherne, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake. Well in our ears---the Tennyson note of splendor, all-distinct. He showed the perpetually transfigured landscape in transfiguring words."<sup>1</sup> As an example of her meaning, she quotes the description of an island landscape "poignant in the garden-night:"

a breeze began to tremble o'er  
The large leaves of the sycamore,  
.....  
and gathering fresher overhead,  
Rocked the full-foliaged elm, and swam;  
The heavy folded rose, and flung  
The lilies to and fro, and said  
'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away.

Even the common word "lawn" becomes transfigured in his poetry:

In Tennyson's poem the word is wonderful, as though it had never been dull: "The mountain lawn was dewy-dark." It is not that he brings the mountain too near, or ranks them in his own peculiar garden-plot, but that the word withdraws to summits, withdraws into dreams; the lawn is aloft, alone, and as wild as ancient snow. It is the same with many another word or phrase changed, by passing into his vocabulary, into something new and strange. His own especially is the March month--his "roaring moon." His is the spirit of the dawning month of flowers and storms; the golden, soft names of daffodil and crocus and caught by the gale as you speak them in his verse, in a fine disproportion with the energy and glow.<sup>2</sup>

For Browning, too, though she decried his somewhat sentimental optimism, Alice Maynell had a poet's appreciation. "Browning," she wrote, "is a strong and very manly poet, a sturdy walker, as it were, in sturdy

1. Ibid., p. 21.

2. Ibid., p. 20.

metre."<sup>1</sup> True, he was not like Tennyson, versatile, but it is only seldom, as she notes, that versatility is associated with the highest manifestation of genius; for range is not to be confounded with versatility: "The most tremendous range in all poetry is that magically pavilioned under Shakespeare's mind; yet few poets have been less versatile than Shakespeare."<sup>2</sup>

Discussing Browning's poetic grasp, she notes that the lack of individualism in some of his characters---Norbert and Constance, for instance---disappears mainly when his personages are possessed by the more violent passions or when they present some rare idiosyncrasy. "For," she writes, "there is a close analogy between his tastes in reading and in creation. His love for curious book-lore is precisely analogous to his love for curious character-lore. He is a psychological collector, and with the true collector's spirit often (somewhat regrettably often) prefers rarity to beauty."<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the disputed matter of Browning's metre, she believes that much of the attack here comes from those who favor only the "Dorian mode of flutes and soft recorders," and not the music of "sonorous metal blowing martial sounds." Speaking generally, she feels that roughness of metre is not only excusable but is a merit "when it is required in order

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1. The School of Poetry, p. 148.

2. "Browning," in "Reviews and Views," Merry England, July, 1890.

3. Ibid.

to harmonize with the sense, or in poems of some length, to relieve monotony and afford contrast."<sup>1</sup> She admits, however that Browning is often harsh even in his lyrics, usually producing his best effects in sedate and more deliberate rhythms. It is not wise, therefore, to judge Browning solely by his dominant moods. We must take account also of some of the lesser pieces such as "A Face," and "James Lee's Wife," in which, as Mrs. Maynell points out, "not even Rossetti could have dipped his brush in words to more golden purpose."

If Mrs. Maynell was independent enough to brave public opinion in her defense of a fallen favorite---Tennyson, still more daring was she in her adverse criticism of a popular idol---Swinburne. In the days when public adulation was heaped upon Swinburne, when a forthcoming poem was bulletined a week in advance by such an outstanding paper as the Fall Mall Gazette, when the actual appearance of the poem was announced in headlines, and the poem itself featured on the front page, it was a courageous critic indeed who could point out to an infatuated public that the poet on whom they bestowed their praise, though a true poet indeed, was a poet "with a perverted fancy rather than an imagination, a poet with puny passions, a poet with no more than the momentary and impulsive sincerity of an infirm soul, a poet with small intellect."<sup>2</sup>

She acknowledged Swinburne's magical vocabulary, yet complained of his indigence of thought: "Swinburne's failure of intellect was, in the

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1. Ibid.

2. "Swinburne's Lyrical Poetry," Hearts of Controversy, p. 55.

fullest and most serious sense, a national disaster, and his instinct for words was a national surprise."<sup>1</sup> But it was Swinburne's very fluency of diction that led him to "immoderate expressiveness, to immodest sweetness, to a jugglery, and prestidigitation, and conjuring of words, to transformations and transmutations of sound," in short to an exaggeration of manner. But even more deplorable was the result of this fluency on his matter, for, she asserts, it is the word that holds and uses his meaning, rather than the meaning that compasses and grasps the word: "I believe that Swinburne's thoughts have their sources, their home, their origin, their authority and their mission in these two places--his own vocabulary and the passion of other men. This," she admits, "is a very grave charge." She therefore proceeds to justify her assertion:

First, then in regard to the passion of other men, I have given to his own emotion the purest name I could find for it; I have no nobler name for his intellect. But other men had thoughts, other men had passions; political, natural, noble, vile, ideal, gross, rebellious, agonising, imperial, republican, brutal, compassionate; and with these he fed his verses. Upon these and their life he sustained, he fattened, he enriched his poetry. Mazzini in Italy, Gautier and Baudelaire in France, Shelley in England, made for him a base of passionate and intellectual supplies...

Having had recourse to the passion of stronger minds for his provision of emotions, Swinburne had direct recourse to his own vocabulary as a kind of "safe" wherein he stored what was needed for a song. Claudius stole the precious diadem of the kingdom and put it in his pocket; Swinburne took from the shelf of literature---took with what art, what touch, what cunning, what complete skill!----the treasure of the language, and put it in his pocket.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid. p. 59

2. Ibid. p. 65.

3. Ibid. p. 72.



But if Swinburne failed to fuse thought and word into a verity of expression, not so Coventry Patmore. Not once but several times--notably in the Odes--he attained to that transcendent simplicity which Mrs. Mayneell looked upon as the highest art. This was due in part to his mastery of diction, but even more to his profundity of emotion: "Emotion is here, too, and in shocks and throes, never frantic even when almost intolerable. It is mortal pathos...Love and sorrow are pure in The Unknown Eros; and its author has not refused even the cup of terror."

She regards Patmore as a realist---but a realist with a difference: "To some readers, whom the mysticism of Coventry Patmore has led into regions of thought as distant as lovely," she writes, "it may seem somewhat strange to place this difficult singer in the band of naturalistic writers--nevertheless he belongs to these by a realism so strong that it has endured through the greatest variations of subject and manner which we have ever known in any poet. Only his realism, when he began, was of that more superficial kind which deals with minuteness---with the faithful rendering of circumstance and accessory---whereas it became later the nobler realism which consists of a penetrating intimacy of the heart, and in which nothing stands between the speaker and the hearer--no veil of words, for the word is living; nor is the art a veil, for the art of expression and the emotion expressed are one, so stringently close is the feeling."<sup>1</sup>

She realizes that the reader's difficulty in understanding Patmore's work is due not to manner but to matter, to the difficulty in grasping his

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1. "Twixt Anacreon and Plato," Kerry England, December, 1888, p. 70.

somewhat esoteric gospel of the parallel between divine and human love. For this reason it is inevitable that the general purpose of the poems should be obscure, yet the obscurity is that of "profound clear waters." In succinct terms she defines for us the central features of Patmore's philosophy: "What the poet chiefly secures to us is the understanding that love and its bonds, its bestowal and reception, does but rehearse the action of the Union of God with humanity...."<sup>1</sup>

Patmore's philosophy of life found its counterpart in his poetical technique: "As he very literally and actually held the members of the body to be divine, so may it be said that he saw in poetry also the incarnate word; the metre, the diction, the pause, the rhyme, the phrase were not accidental but essential. Hence his extraordinary mastery of style."<sup>2</sup>

But Mrs. Meynell did not fail to point out certain recurrent flaws in Patmore's versification, which, despite the heart-searching implications of his philosophy, sometimes marred the general effect of his work. In the construction of the ode, she says, Patmore "seems hardly to have studied effectually the pauses and proportions which are as subtle and indefinable in this form of composition as they are in rhythmic prose. In diction he is, as a rule, exquisitely if not obviously musical; but the cadences are too often incomplete. For instance, two lines of unvarying

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1. "Mr. Coventry Patmore's Odes," op. cit. p. 92.
  2. "Coventry Patmore," Second Person Singular, p. 108.

length frequently come together in such a proportion that they read into one ordinary heroic line; the voice marks them as two by making a pause which were best avoided, and the rhyme becomes unpleasantly accentuated. This is very common in the odes. Whatever sequence of lengths is chosen in writing this irregular measure, that combination of two lines into one of ten syllables should surely be eschewed. Again, some of the short lines are too abruptly short; it is not agreeable to stop with an emphatic rhyme upon a line of two syllables."<sup>1</sup> To justify these strictures, she observes quite truly that these technical defects are important to the lover of perfect forms since they seriously obstruct the large sweep and flight of the ode.

For Patmore's poetry, nevertheless, she predicts no common popularity, but an essential solitude that is conferred not by the world's neglect, but by its own quality. For his, she says, is high poetry indeed--- poetry that has "the more dreadful solitude of an experience, and goes far in an inverse flight, through the essentially single human heart--- intimately into time and space, remotely into the heart of hearts."

But if the fusion of word and spirit was a condition of greatness in Coventry Patmore, so likewise was it an indication of the authentic Muse in so dissimilar a poet as Rudyard Kipling. Mrs. Meynell saw in the Barrack-Room Ballads a lyrical power that made the slang, the music, and the picture one. Moreover, she felt that Kipling rendered a distinct service to the soldier in literature by individualizing him. Obviously," she remarks, "the soldier is of all men the most generally known in mass.

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1. "Twixt Anacreon and Plato," op. cit., p. 76.

He is 'generalized,' as an artist of what was once the Grand School might say. The artist of that school was aware of a tree, but he did not descend to be aware of an elm. And the soldier, poor fellow, was even more generalized than the tree of the 'grand style;' for he was hardly a tree at all---he was one of the forest. He was hardly a man---he was one of 'the men.' And art, in its dignity, so treated him. He appeared in art en masse. So did he in literature. He was "flushed with victory" in the impersonal manner known to the historical style. He was, in the aggregate, the "repulsed battalion" of the heroic couplet. He was wholesale. He was never dealt with en détail--- he was treated en gros.<sup>1</sup>

But Kipling, has presented a much more personalized study of the soldier. His characters are individuals full of the personality, habit, and tradition that come to life in the barracks and the service. They are full of the nature of their nationality, but they are, nevertheless, the only men who have borne their names and worn their shoes. Even when Kipling treats of a typical figure like Tommy Atkins, he manages to infuse the personal element into his characterization: "He considers the type, but he finds the type so personal, so peculiar, so unlike any other type in the world, that no personal interest is lacking. The type bears the name of a man and with reason. The animal-child-man, simple and limited, passionate, adult, thinking and feeling in the slang that makes a very world, is what drill, and idleness, bear, tyranny, and the reason and

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1. "The Soldier's Post," Nerry England, April, 1893, p. 442.

unreason whereby he is governed, make of the raw material of gross young manhood....It is not difficult to be aware of these characteristics and others of the soldier. It is not difficult, therefore to speak of them. But to speak for him as Mr. Rudyard Kipling does in these unforgettable ballads, is to have the genius of dramatic literature in high power."<sup>1</sup>

Yet there was one phase of the soldier's nature which Kipling did not completely understand. The soldier would not, even if he could, said Mrs. Keynell, write of battle as does Kipling, for despite his garrulity he had reticences which the poet failed to observe: "A soldier having his grace d'état keeps the professional secret which restrains physician and priest."<sup>2</sup> It would have been better for Kipling if, in accepting the soldier's confidence, he had accepted also a share in his conventions. "Kipling is terribly articulate on his behalf; he has all the language at his command that makes barrack-room and camping ground completely explicit--and there is no great harm in that. But there should be some reluctance in probing the bayonet-wound with the same right, complete, and all-explicit word. There should be hesitation with regard to declaring the suicide of a man in despair over his wounds, or the judicial crushing of a dying man's breast by the wheels of his brother's gun-carriage; there should be silence as to the 'bluing' of flesh where

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1. Ibid., p. 444.

2. Ibid., p. 448.

'the bayonet kissed.' Mr. Kipling's hearing, seeing, and smelling are at one with his word, which proves him a true writer; but there are some words that are to be formed, as the right ultimate of a man's art, but not to be communicated."<sup>1</sup>

But Mrs. Maynell did not confine her interests solely to English poetry. In the American tradition of letters also, she had a living interest. "In ripeness, not in rawness," she declared, "consists the excellence of Americans,"<sup>2</sup> and she read the literature of the New World with a swift appreciation for its better qualities. In Oliver Wendell Holmes she found the forerunner of the New Humorist. True, not all of Holmes' writings were of the same standard of excellence, and at least fifty percent of his comedy she found to be of an obvious and rather slapstick variety, yet the other half she pronounced "excellent, keen, jolly, temperate," and because of that temperance, "the most stimulating and fecundating of qualities," she felt that his humor "had set the literature of a hemisphere to a tune of mirth."<sup>3</sup> For Emerson she had a sincere admiration, and felt that he was to be one of the outstanding figures of American poetry. As for James Russell Lowell, although she regarded him as a critic without reproach, a man of letters "judicious, judicial, disinterested, patient, happy, temperate, delighted," she admitted frankly

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1. Ibid., p. 449.

2. "James Russell Lowell," The Rhythm of Life, p. 69.

3. "Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes," The Rhythm of Life, p. 62.

that he was no poet:

To accept his verse as a poet's would be to confess a lack of instinct and there is no more grievous lack in a lover of poetry. Reason, we grant, makes for a full acceptance of his poems, and perhaps so judicial a mind as his may be forgiven for having trusted to reason and to criticism. His trust was justified--if such justification avails--by the admiration of fairly educated people who apparently held him to be a poet first, a humorist in the second place, and an essayist incidentally. It is hard to believe that he failed in instinct about himself. More probably he was content to forego it when he found the ode, the lyric, and the narrative verses all so willing. They made no difficulty, and he made none; why then are we reluctant to acknowledge the manifest stateliness of this verse, and the evident grace of that, and the fine thought finely worded? Such reluctance justifies itself. Nor would I attempt to back it by the cheap sanctions of prophecy. Nay, it is quite possible that Lowell's poems may live; I have no commands for futurity. Enough that he enriched the present with the example of a scholarly, linguistic, verbal love of literature, with a studiousness full of heart.<sup>1</sup>

In her estimate of Edgar Allen Poe, too, she was something of an iconoclast. Those French critics who, in the middle of the century were convinced that the poetry of Poe was the final success of style, were influenced chiefly, she felt, by the authority of Baudelaire:

Admiring Byron for his eloquence and Poe for his magic, the Frenchman thought he was admiring English poetry, and went confidently astray in all the illusions. If this was the genius of the North, nothing was more accessible. It had not been worth while to make a difficulty of anything so easy. He knew these two foreign poets in their recesses comme sa poche. At the same time he would have the honors of the explorer and got them. Baudelaire, after reading Byron and Poe, was welcomed home with the welcome of a far traveller, and his face was searched for the report of strange things. Insensibly he dissembled, and announced to Paris the genius of the North. Add to that eloquence and that magic the trick and the friction of a strange tongue, and you have the illusion of style.<sup>2</sup>

1. "James Russell Lowell," op. cit., p. 73.

2. "Edgar Allen Poe," Pall Mall Gazette, December 22, 1897.

Despite his popularity in some quarters, she pronounced Poe's writings to be no better than pinchbeck. His thought, she felt, was narrow in range, and he capitalized on the quality of mystery he was able to convey: "A little mystery well-presented---an intelligible mysteriousness at any rate---may puzzle the fancy with more delight than a great mystery in the distance. And if any one should aver that the very character of mystery is to be out of reach, let him read Edgar Allen Poe, and see how satisfactory mysteriousness may be made. The paradox must needs be accepted. Poe's mysteriousness is exceedingly satisfactory to the ordinary reader, and, without being a resolute gobsmouche, one may be appalled by him, by his ravens and his rhymes. If a critic may hazard a phrase about him, it would be to say that he had a real talent for a doubtful mysteriousness."<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of his metrical effects, too, she believed, was the result of a similar talent for obviousness. Thus the versification of "The Raven," "Ulalume," and "Annabel Lee," though free from faults, was yet a limited thing. "He wrote true verse," she acknowledged, "and if we miss the slight friction of the truest verse of all--the verse which confesses the difficulties from which it suffers not--that lack is to be mentioned to show how very well Poe did, in metre as in mystery. What he was fell short, rather than what he did. Pinchbeck does not seem too harsh a word."<sup>2</sup>

But through the brief stanzas of John Bannister Tabb, there pulsed, she averred, the current of true poetry. "This," she wrote, "is fertility

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.



of a most unusual kind; it is not only quality in a little space but-- more remarkable---quantity in a little space. It is for abundance that we must praise him---the several, separate, distinct, discreet abundance of entire brief lyrics."<sup>1</sup> In his slight paradoxes of interplay and counterchange she found a resemblance to the poetry of the seventeenth century wit and worshipper, George Herbert. Not without cause, she said, were these complete poems so brief; "Sudden flights of song are they, and swift and far, quickly-closed, all content. They are, each and all, so many surprises, and though one may be loath to adopt the too-prevalent practice of illustrating one art by means of another...we may find an analogy in music which we call melody. The ear-enchancing and heart-delighting melody of Mozart---let us say 'Batti, batti'---could not be other than brief; its close, too, is implied in its beginning...It could not be other than it is, for every one of all the few notes from the beginning expected it; and yet, though these notes foretold it, the listening ear did not know it until it came. So it is with Father Tabb's entire and perfect stanza."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, she found his poetry to be a product of the intellectual imagination: "To a form so light, so frail, so small as that of his verse, it might have been expected that he would commit the lighter burden of epigram in thought, and of visible and material similitudes in imagery:

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1. "Father Tabb," Catholic World, February, 1910, p. 577.

2. Ibid.

in a word, that his poetry would be the poetry of fancy rather than poetry of the imagination. But something less than half of his poems are merely fanciful; the greater part are greatly imaginative. And so important, so momentous, and so significant is Father Tabb's finer imagery that it is at once the matter, and the form, and the substance of the poems."<sup>1</sup>

But, as we have already noted, Mrs. Maynell's criticism was not confined to poetry alone. Prose literature, too, was an object of her study, and to it she directed the same careful attention that she gave to poetry. One aspect of her prose criticism is of particular interest. The "literary woman" then coming into prominence was an object of much barbed criticism on the part of the reviewers. Mrs. Maynell, whose judicial comments reveal an unprejudiced mind in the matter, pointed out the fact that the comparative narrowness of the literary woman's subjects was due in no small measure to the restrictions of her social environment. This, she believed, accounted for the prevalence of the village chronicle in the pages of women writers:

The village is neither solitude nor public life. It is a world of personal relations, and women have been compelled, in a manner impossible for men, to the leisure of its chronicling. With their incommunicable humor, with their patient derision, with their unwearyed and unshared vigilance, the best of these chroniclers have had for their own part a singular and solitary lot...No man, the equal intellectually of Miss Austen, say, and not physically disabled, would consent to live, work, and die in her village. The consent, forced upon a woman, has inevitably an all-

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1. Ibid.

influential effect upon her art. It increases at once her interest and her isolation, her communion and her separateness. She is wise enough, if she is a woman of real talent, not to seek her revenge, or even her compensation outside. She does not wander into distance or romance unauthenticated. She seeks her compensation at her doors; she takes herself amends among her neighbors. She does not revile or decry or condemn them; she seriously, studiously, precisely explains them.<sup>1</sup>

Lucy Hutchinson, the seventeenth century writer, was however, "a woman of letters in a far more serious sense than our own time uses." Mrs. Keynell detects in her prose a Stevenson-like character, "a kind of gesture of language," such as occurs in the passage wherein she praises her husband's "handsome management of love." On the subject of politics, however, Mrs. Hutchinson wrote platitudes, but even these were simple, and some were stated with dignity. Moreover, "her power, her integrity, her tenderness, her pomp, the liberal and public interests of her life, her good breeding, her education, her exquisite diction, are such as may well make a reader ask how and why the literature of England declined upon the vulgarity, ignorance, cowardice, foolishness, that became 'feminine' in the estimation of a later age, that is, in the character of women succeeding her, and in the estimation of men succeeding her lord."<sup>2</sup>

If Lucy Hutchinson had little leisure for praise of the natural beauty of earth and sky there was, nevertheless, in her work "an abiding sense of the pleasantness of the rural world. "What an England was hers!"

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1. "The Village in Literature," Pall Mall Gazette, February 23, 1894.
  2. "The Seventeenth Century," Essays, p. 199.

exclaims Mrs. Maynell, "And what English! A memorable vintage of our literature and speech was granted in her days; we owe much to those who-- as she did---gathered it in."<sup>1</sup>

Not so fortunate in the medium in which she worked, however, was Lady Mary Wortley Montague who wrote after "the spiritual imagination of English literature" had "fled away upon some wandering wind." Writing in a limited prose, in which a willing sensibility had its limited place, Lady Mary's work had "at least a negative purity of style. She is no unworthy Addisonian."<sup>2</sup> But her wit, if it were despoiled of "its well-taught graces of restricted phrase and of its own self-applause," would have little to recommend it. Her vivacity, which in the eighteenth century served almost as a synonym for her writings, is most excellent when the customs of the Court are to be described in their minor differences, but even at its best, as Mrs. Maynell points out, "the vivacity is not vitality."

But Lady Mary at least had a quick observation and a sensitive eye for the world about her. Her younger contemporary, Fanny Burney, was a "mere daydreamer, making public the most foolish and most common of all waste thoughts, as in the astonishing patience with which she repeats the embarrassing successes of Evelina's beauty"... "Uselessness, egotism, and helplessness---these," says Mrs. Maynell, "are the characteristics of the dreams and wishes betrayed in Evelina."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 200.

2. "Lady Mary Wortley Montague," Pall Mall Gazette, October 5, 1896.

3. "Evelina," Pall Mall Gazette, January 31, 1896.

and she has a word of disparagement for Fanny Burney's humor: "Those who read Evelina now are generally lured to it by the tradition of the author's humor. The greater part of the humor in the novel is, nevertheless, the dullest and most violent thing of its kind in the world...She believed she was doing good farce, and part of the labour of reading about her Mrs. Duval, her M. Dubois, and her weary, weary 'Captain' is caused by the reader's sense of the perverse and boisterous enjoyment of the author. It is ill that she should like it, but it would be worse if she did not."<sup>1</sup>

The passages dealing with the heroine's cousins, the Branghtons, and Mr. Smith, are, in Mrs. Keynell's estimation, the best portions of the book, since they have in them some true effect of comedy. "The nearest approach to art in the book is here," she avers. "Let Miss Burney, moreover, have the whole benefit of the inequalities of time. Her time was her good luck like any other grace; and she was one of the first English authors to deal with a heroine's vulgar cousins. It does not seem difficult to do, but she did it with effect. She has a twang. The modern Cockney almost begins with Evelina."<sup>2</sup>

A friend of Fanny Burney's who preferred to be known as a writer rather than as a hostess was Mrs. Thrale---"Mrs. Thrale with her thoughts in their simplicity always well-arrayed and braced in the close order of the English language as she had so long listened to it respectfully, read it studiously, and wrote it neatly; Mrs. Thrale who thought with docility

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

and even loved Pioszi in well-knit phrase and within the not-useless boundaries of a distinct and responsible style, whose emotions had always been capable of a limited energy of expression, and, at the very crisis of her fortunes, had held with dignity well within the grasp of an educated prose."

Yet few of Hester Thrale's writings are now remembered save her memoirs, written in old age, and her allegories. "That she wrote allegories persistently, glibly," says Mrs. Maynell, "proves how ordinary was her fancy, and how she lacked imagination."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, she had a good ear for poetry and knew the importance of vowel sounds not only in the rhyme but within the verse: "She had Johnson's praise for her versification. She was always translating Latin or French epigrams into last-century English verse, and he told her that he could not have done it more closely himself. She had the honor to teach Johnson something about pauses."<sup>2</sup>

When Mrs. Thrale, the conservative, read Frankenstein in her last years, remarks Mrs. Maynell, she thought it an audacious work of the new era, and evidently read it with a sense of dismay. Nevertheless, Mary Shelley's book had little merit besides the inventiveness of fancy shown in the creation of a living man in the laboratory. "The 'peany dreadful'," says Mrs. Maynell, "requires a certain amount of courage to set forth, but this kind of courage was the commonplace of the society in which she had been bred. It is not justified by a single passage that proves a moment

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1. "Mrs. Thrale as a Writer," Full Mail Gazette, December 13, 1895.

2. Ibid.

of mental vision, or so much as a single thought well thought out, or a grief of the heart taken once to heart."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the Oriental complication of story within story thwarts the unity of the narrative. The monster himself, who has "all the ready-made feelings inherited by other people, a full equipment of his own personal sensibilities, and a vocabulary for the glibness and cheapness of which the word 'ready-made' is hardly sufficient," talks in a deplorable style that not only fails to conform to the better eighteenth century usage, but is made up of "the drags of that age in language and sentiment."<sup>2</sup>

Not much better was the style of Miss Mitford whose chronicle, Our Village, Mrs. Maynell regarded merely as an unoffending book wholly lacking in wit. A tendency to generalize, and such a love for adjectives "as must surely be unmatched in English prose," made for a lax style. "You may look in vain, page by page," says Mrs. Maynell, "for a noun trusted to do its own work. Miss Mitford's primroses are more faded by epithets than ever by lack of water."<sup>3</sup> Moreover she looks upon Miss Mitford's writings as quite common in quality, since for all her affability she has not an instant of humor, for all her quickness not a glimpse of wit, and for all her ejaculations over sunsets and trees, and roses she conveys no sense of summer or the country even to the willing reader.

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1. "Frankenstein," Fall Mall Gazette, October 6, 1897.

2. Ibid.

3. "Miss Mitford," Fall Mall Gazette, February 23, 1898.

Moreover, she seems to miss everything--the lambs, the dog, the parrot, and the village children of whom she prattles so much: "Miss Mitford's vocabulary seems in itself to contain them all. It must be that you have only to take up that vocabulary hanging together, as it does, with its jog-trot liveliness, its uninteresting, paltry audacities in the cause of the picturesque, and its indefatigable little animation, and you shall find there, more than ready, all the stories of all the chances that could possibly befall in a village as it is described by Miss Mitford."<sup>1</sup>

In another chronicle of village life, Jane Austen, Mrs. Meynell found a much more original talent, for even amid the restrictions of family and village "her genius was sufficient unto itself." Nevertheless Mrs. Meynell censures her, not because she works upon small matters, but because she makes important things seem trivial.

Things are not trivial merely because they are small; but that which makes life, art, and work trivial is triviality of relations. Mankind lives by vital relations; and if these are mean, so is the life, so is the art that expresses them because it can express no more. With Miss Austen love, vengeance, devotion, duty, maternity, sacrifice, are infinitely trivial. There is also a constant relation of watchfulness, of prudence. As the people in her stories watch one another, so does Miss Austen seem to be watching them, and her curiosity is intense indeed; she realizes their colds--her female characters take a great many colds--so that one seems to hear her narrate the matter in a muffled voice, but not precisely because of her sympathy. That such close observation can work on without tenderness, must be a proof of this author's exceeding cynicism.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. "The Classic Novelist," Second Person Singular, p. 63.



For the art of the Brontë sisters Mrs. Meynell had a warmer appreciation, though she recognized, particularly in Emily, qualities which militated against an easy popularity. "Emily Brontë's genius," she wrote, "her great and lonely intellect, that force of hers in which there is none of the tensility of secret weakness, but an intensity that never falters; her solemnity, her solitary courage, her direct contemplation of solitary evil, and the more than human liberty which she claims for her own great and melancholy heart---these have made her dear to no public."<sup>1</sup>

Alice Meynell was one of the earliest critics to point out the nobler style of Emily Brontë and the superior quality of her Wuthering Heights. In Heathcliff's love for Catherine's past childhood she found "one of the profound surprises of this unparalleled book; it is to call her childish ghost--the ghost of the little girl--when she has been a dead adult woman twenty years that the inhuman lover opens the window of the house on the Heights. Something is this that the reader knew not how to look for."<sup>2</sup> Still another quality "known to genius and beyond the reader's hope" is "the tempestuous purity of those passions." "This wild quality of purity" she says, "has a brief counterpart in the brief passages of nature that make the summers, the waters, the woods, and the windy heights of that murderous story seem so sweet. The 'beck' that was audible beyond the hills after rain, the 'heath' on the top of Wuthering Heights..... the only two white spots of snow left on all the moors, and the brooks

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1. "Poetesses," Merry England, p. 300.

2. "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," Hearts of Controversy, p. 63.

brim-full; the old apple-trees, the smell of stocks and wallflowers in the brief summer, the few fir-trees by Catherine's window-bars, the "early noon---I know not," says Mrs. Maynell, "where are landscapes more exquisite and natural."<sup>1</sup>

But even in such landscapes cool with the breath of fresh winds, Emily Brontë practices little or no imagery. "Her style had the key of an inner prose which seems to have imagery behind in the way of approaches." It was her sister Charlotte who walked, "with exultation and enterprise upon the road of symbols, under the guidance of her own visiting genius."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Charlotte's style was not uniformly excellent. She had inherited a manner of English that was strained beyond recovery, and her innate sense of propriety caused her to conform to it. Why, asks Mrs. Maynell, was the pen that could write luminous paragraphs involved so often in the lifeless vulgarisms of the no-style pages and pages of her novels? And the answer is, to use Charlotte Brontë's own phrase, that there was something "operating as a barrier;" this, says Mrs. Maynell, was "the grocer's English then ruling," a language that was "an insult to the English that had gone before, and a defiance to the English that should come after."<sup>3</sup> Thus the term, "operating as a barrier," had many companion phrases in Charlotte Brontë's works. For example, the hero in The Professor talks like a nursery governess about "an extensive and eligible

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1. Ibid., p. 96.

2. Ibid., p. 90.

3. "Phrases," Pall Mall Gazette, May 31, 1895.

connection," and "a small competency." When he should be telling of his wife's teaching, he says she is "communicating instruction;" and as might be expected, her pupils "received the impression of elevated sentiments." The Professor himself has "an excellent connection, first opened by unsolicited recommendation." Such phrases, says Mrs. Maynell, fill the mouth with sand. And yet, "encumbered by this drift and refuse of English, Charlotte Brontë, achieved the miracle of her vocabulary. It is less wonderful that she should have appeared out of such a personage than that she should have arisen out of such a language."<sup>1</sup>

That she did rise above the English of the mid-century, however, is shown in infrequent pages of her novels and in the whole of the preface to her sisters' works.

If Charlotte Brontë had not written that page," says Mrs. Maynell, "she might have what popularity she could get, but she would have no serious fame. and if it is urged that a single splendid classic phrase, even though, like this, it have all the qualities, is not enough to prove any writer great, the answer is that it should be enough, when it is so great that none but an essentially great writer could have written it. Simple, close, impassioned, composed, majestic, solitary, and yet most appealing is the genius of those lovely passages. Their nobility, no less than the incommunicable sorrow which they imply, gives them that sense of loneliness which does so crown a single and perfect art."

Nor was Mrs. Maynell concerned only with the recognized names in literature. In the pages of her more informal criticism one finds discussions, sometimes ironical, sometimes witty, of the "popular" fiction of her time. Thus, in the days when Quind's books headed the

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1. "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," op. cit. p. 79.
  2. "Phrases," Pall Mall Gazette, May 31, 1895.

lists of "best-sellers," Mrs. Meynell's criticism was timely and to the point. She saw in Ouida a mistress of all the habits of mediocrity: "She says a thing, and then says it over again from the beginning exactly as a cook does. She owns easily a rich vocabulary, but she makes it commoner than she knows. She never approaches pathos even from a distance though she seems to publish and scatter its secret words."<sup>1</sup>

Then, too, although Ouida has an admirable sense of place, in her Italian stories she loses her observation of the peasant in a whole convention of sentiment. "One of the dreadfully easy and picturesque habits she has," says Mrs. Meynell, "is that of taking her own knowledge of her subject dashingly for granted.. That knowledge cannot possibly go far, surely, for she advertises her ignorance of the language. In a book full of Italian sentences there is hardly one without a mistake. If she translates a snatch of song, she translates it wrong."<sup>2</sup>

Even Ouida's grammar is faulty: "The man of today does many things," says Mrs. Meynell, "but he does not say, 'If I hadn't have.' The Guardians of Ouida--the very princely ones--do. There is one called Bertie, or 'the Beauty.' 'With all his faults,' says a writer in the Yellow Book, 'he is a man, and a man of recognizably large nature...a man of strong passions and of a zeal for life.' What Bertie says is, 'If I had not have proposed to her.'"<sup>3</sup>

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1. "The Praises of Ouida," Fall Mall Gazette, August 16, 1895.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

In Mrs. Trollope's Widow Barnaby, Mrs. Maynell detects a peculiar tone in regard to wealth and 'family' which reminds her, almost in spite of herself, of Jane Austen. "It is the only reminder, of course," she says, "but it is a distinct one. The sense of property is rigid. There are a middle-class security of exclusiveness, a grave integrity of worldliness in the good people---a worldliness that is not frivolous, a proper pride, all infinitely disquieting."<sup>1</sup>

This book, cheapened on the book-stalls, but not virtually forgotten, attains its humorous effects by the crudest of methods: "With what heart does this author laugh open-mouthed at her widow's bonnets, deliberately mismatch her colors, count her cheese-cakes, repeat her beer, do over again all those ignominious things that depend upon their cumulative value for effect, and must therefore be done often...and yet make her tragically an egotist."<sup>2</sup>

Another woman of manifold writings was Mrs. Lynn Linton. Her novels, written with a carelessness that betrays literary ignorance, and dedicated to the few still-surviving "sweet women," produce, says Mrs. Maynell, an effect of vague indignation. Although for the most part her books are in no real sense written at all, yet in one thing at least she is to be distinguished from the horde of minor novelists, for, whereas they fail with one accord when something moving or dramatic is to be told, Mrs. Lynn Linton is at her best in the most important moments: "The others,"

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1. "Mrs. Trollope the Humorist," Pall Mall Gazette, Nov. 15, 1895.

2. Ibid.

says Mrs. Meynell, "are able to please you with some success in the slighter parts of their stories, precisely as actors and actresses do in the insignificant parts of a play, or painters with figures in a relaxed attitude. But from the instant when the phrase is full of action it begins to confess its weakness. In narrative it flags; in dialogue it has an unavailing dramatic strain---but the narrative is generally the more lamentable. The fact that Mrs. Lynn Linton has so timely an accession of strength is enough to distinguish her from among a hundred."<sup>1</sup>

In Miss Ferrier, the author of The Inheritance, Mrs. Meynell found a writer whose sense of humor tended toward derision. Thus, Miss Ferrier's novel may have served some permanent purpose in literature by giving Tennyson the plot of "Lady Clare," but, says Mrs. Meynell, "she wrote romance with a suavity that has long since ceased to interest man, woman, or child. It seems to have afforded her a refuge from some reluctant conviction that she was a comic writer."<sup>2</sup>

It was while the newspaper advertisements were announcing triumphantly that Mrs. Wood's Dane Hollow had reached its forty-fifth thousand in sales, that Mrs. Meynell reviewed the book. She saw in it a lengthy and haphazard narrative written with no sense of structure. "The story," she says, "is a long and scattered anecdote....It happens to proceed so much by chance that the author leaves out one of her most important incidents about the middle of the book; it slips her memory apparently---she

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1. "Mrs. Lynn Linton," Pall Mall Gazette, July 20, 1898.

2. "Miss Ferrier," Pall Mall Gazette, August 31, 1898.

forgets to tell it. She remembers it much later on. It is the violent death of the Squire's grand-daughter, and quite a turning point for the Squire, so that indeed to have jogged on without it was no small feat of obliviousness. The volunteer bandman who had lost--he did not know how--the big drum, did no more than Mrs. Henry Wood who mislays the tragic end of Margaret Clanwaring midway in her novel."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the faulty structure of the book Mrs. Meynell points out the author's lack of skill in handling dialogue. "To all the incidents and there are many, injustice is done by the gabble of Mrs. Wood's persons and of Mrs. Woods alike. 'Thus they lingered, talking of one thing and another,' jogs on the author by way of presenting the dialogue between two lovers. And not the lovers only, but all the people in the book talk of one thing and another...One topic succeeds another in the most futile series of dialogues ever penned."<sup>2</sup> She rebukes the national taste that not only tolerates but even welcomes such twaddle;

Now, it is not of an every-day novelist that you ask a really significant dialogue--a conversation that is the effectual speech of a group of minds--their summits, their summary, a little gathering--close and thronging together, and harvesting of their phrases, the best brevity of their encounters---dialogue true to nature but set free of insignificant accident. As the poet says in "Timon of Athens," this "tutors nature." But between this art and the talk of the forty-fifth thousand, were there not degrees upon which the public approval might have rested? What but idleness--so idle that it will not even be troubled or quickened to welcome, to receive, to admire a little---could make a national success of

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1. "The Forty-Fifth Thousand," Pall Mall Gazette, Sept. 16, 1896.

2. Ibid.

dialogue as it is rendered by Mrs. Wood?"<sup>1</sup>

It was laxity of public taste, too, which earlier in the century had encouraged Dickens in the worst features of his style. "His people, his populace, and the first critic of his day," says Mrs. Maynell, "pushed him further and yet further on the way of abandonment--the way of easy extremes; by praise, by popularity, by acclamation they sent their novelist in search of yet more occasion of laughter and tears, of caricature and intemperate pathos."<sup>2</sup> On the whole, this immediate response was not good for his art; it would have been better for Dickens if, "even while standing applauded and acclaimed, he had appraised the applause more coolly and more justly, and within his inner mind."

Though she found in him much to depreciate, she also found much to admire. His humor, his dramatic tragedy, and his watchfulness over inanimate things and landscapes proved him to be a true artist, despite his somewhat glaring defects. Moreover, she saw in Dickens a conspicuous genius for words which the habitual indifference of his time and of his readers could not quench. She never read him, she declared, without undergoing a new conviction of his authorship, of the vitality of his diction, striking a way through the burden of custom. "But for one or two great exceptions of that day," she asked, "who valued the spirit, precision, and nobility of a phrase? Who cared to study English or to look back beyond the century then plodding on a foot neither sound nor majestic?.....

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1. Ibid.

2. "Charles Dickens As a Writer"-II, Pall Mall Gazette, Jan. 16, 1899.



Refuse words, too emphatic but with a worn emphasis; strained rhetoric that had lost its elasticity; grave phrases grown dull---authors worked with these sufficiently well-content. The phrases filled the mouth--with drugs. In the work of Dickens there are passages of such English neither subtle nor simple, and there are swaggerings, and a thousand false things. He wrote so as a mere matter of course. But his own lively genius asserted itself to be a true writer's genius, by means of the very word, not only here or there, or suddenly, but often. It had its way, its only way to prove that he could write, and was an authentic writer in the springs and sources of his thoughts."1

She saw in him also an instant ability to grasp the descriptive word. This quality is shown in many passages that are at once simple and masterly. Thus, the autumn leaves fall thick, "but never fast, for they come circling down with a dead lightness." Again, in David Copperfield: "There had been a wind all day; and it was rising then with an extraordinary great sound....Long before we saw the sea, its spray was on our lips...The water was out over the flat country, and every sheet and puddle lashed its banks, and had its stress of little breakers....The people came to their doors all salant, and with streaming hair."2

And yet with all his felicities of diction says Mrs. Maynell, Dickens had not a great style, for, though his style had life enough for movement, it did not have life enough for peace. His was a secondary style, "a

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1. "Charles Dickens as a Writer"-I, Fall Mail Gazette, Jan. 11, 1899.

2. Quoted in "Dickens as a Man of Letters," Hearts of Controversy. pp. 39-

style of less than high order, and beset, encumbered, and embarrassed by customs not of his own making, and also by manners for which he himself must answer, but a style self-proved." Likewise his was an impulsive literature, but his claim to authorship was evinced by "the immediate, enterprising, brilliant choice of the word and the thought as one."<sup>1</sup>

A contemporary of Dickens, who, like him, wrote with a distinct purpose, was Charles Reade. Though he was preoccupied with the exposure of the social evils of his day, with protests against the evils of trade-unionism, with attacks on the English prison system and the like, Charles Reade's merit as a writer lay, not in his didactic purposes, but in the vivacity of his incidents. To these incidents he managed to convey the strength of simple and single emotion. "His shipwrecks and desert islands, fights with panthers, escapes from dungeons, flights on the sails of wind-mills," says Mrs. Maynell, "would affect remembrance no more than do the scalp-hunting incidents of such writers as Mayne Reid, for instance, but for the emotion which beats within the situations."<sup>2</sup> It is this quality which enables him not only to beguile, but to translate and transport his readers. His style, as befitted his subject matter, was hardly a literary style at all: "It was the narrative manner of an excitable and exciting raconteur. And no doubt a good instinct led Charles Reade to adopt it. For, inasmuch as he kept thus near to the primitive human action, and inasmuch as he dealt vividly with events, and impressed the mind with

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1. "Charles Dickens as a Writer," *op. cit.*

2. "Charles Reade," Merry England, May, 1884, p. 18.

things, not comments, he was removed from the purely literary position."<sup>1</sup>

But if, in Roade's stories, the didactic purpose was seldom allowed to lapse, this was not true of Anthony Trollope's novels, for Trollope, says Mrs. Keynell, was "a writer who had no problems to offer, who had never for the moment felt the burden of the unintelligible world, and who kept quite exultantly at the very point at which you would consent to endure his dullness."<sup>2</sup> She regarded him as an excellent writer for "say, the second week of a convalescence," since one could find in his books "that perfect rest and recreation which is yielded by an art that pleases the taste and respects the intelligence of the reader, but makes no call on any of his emotions---not even on that of enthusiasm for the author's skill."<sup>3</sup> She found him a man of surprising limitations, yet popular because of "the little lessons in morality which it pleased him to teach. He gave the public the wholesome and comfortable doctrine which they expected."<sup>4</sup> And she was not a little amused at the discrepancy between the stormy and overwhelming voice of Anthony Trollope and his art, which was devoted to minor happenings and which "accoupled itself with little girls and little bishops."

But in George Meredith she found a much higher realization of the possibilities of the novelist's art. His was a work of intellect and

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1. Ibid.

2. "Anthony Trollope," Pall Mall Gazette, June 23, 1893.

3. "Anthony Trollope," Nearly England, November, 1883, p. 12.

4. Ibid.

philosophy is fiction, and he "did not pause upon his knowledge of the human heart as though knowledge in itself were a good, he used his science: nor did he stop upon his emotions over the pain of life, he used his sympathy."<sup>1</sup> As a writer he was intensely conscious of his subject, yet he was mindful also of his art: He was "a student of mankind who sought to help, without consoling, the race he watched, suffering and hoping with that which he studied, as a physician pressing a finger upon a brother's wrist, caring much for the pulse, for the blood, and for the man's life, caring also much for his own science."<sup>2</sup>

In his creation of character Meredith "took the whole social man into his vision," bending all the powers of an alert mind upon the study of human nature. "Meredith," says Mrs. Maynell, "formed the most possible, the most complex, the most complete and least explicable of women and men, now and then varying these vitally mingled persons by presenting a man who, having one quality only, as the egoism of the Egoist, is yet alive with a most indubitable life. George Meredith seldom tells a story of these people--he tells nothing less than their history."<sup>3</sup>

She looked upon Meredith's philosophy of life as "an austere doctrine, with which the courage of the Stoic is but shallow in its penetration of the soul, is but sparing in its wounding of the heart." Thus his study of

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1. "George Meredith," Second Person Singular, p. 117.
  2. Ibid., p. 118
  3. Ibid., p. 120.

Nature "taught him---not as other students of brute life might suppose--- a simple and irresponsible egotism, but self-denial, self-conquest, and unflinching endurance. He would have the individual man to learn the almost unlearnable lesson that his own fate is of no importance."<sup>1</sup>

She acknowledged that despite Meredith's unquestionable greatness, his art was, in a measure, incomplete, and this was because his work was lacking "in the great and high repose of art which is unconscious of appearances." He was afraid of the commonplace, as is shown plainly in his narrative; "even in recounting the order of the dialogue, he can hardly bear to use the customary 'he said' --he prefers 'she heard'." Moreover, though he had a great imagination, he had a quibbling fancy. All this, of course, reacted on his style. "Of Meredith," says Mrs. Mayne "we might almost say that he has a magnificent style, yet writes but ill, wild as the paradox may sound. Everything worthy to be called style is his, but the phrase is often tormented, racked, and bent. No other man's writing could keep its beauty under such a strain." Nevertheless, she finds in him "such a vitality as nothing can hinder, or rather, such a vitality as all things serve," for, in the final estimate of his genius, "there is no intricacy, there is no labour, there is no accumulation, that does not pass up into the flame of life and make it more erect."

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1. Ibid., p. 121.

CHAPTER IV

ALICE MEYNELL: CRITIC OF ART

To confine the study of Alice Meynell's criticism to her appraisals of literature would be to miss the full significance of her work, for in art, also, she took a vital interest, bringing to her study of it the sensitive perception and the trained intellect of the true connoisseur. In her collected essays, the variety and scope of her artistic interests are merely hinted at, and it is only from the periodicals of her time that one learns how life-long was her study and interpretation of art. As we have already noted, from 1876 until well after the turn of the century--for a period of over thirty years--her art criticisms made their frequent appearances in such periodicals as the Tablet, the Pall Mall Gazette, Merry England, the Art Journal, and the Magazine of Art. For her work as an art-critic she was well equipped. In her cosmopolitan childhood she had lived in many of the art-centers of Europe, and with her father, who was himself a connoisseur of art--a man whose taste was "delicate, liberal, instructed, studious, decile, austere"<sup>1</sup>--she had visited, not the art galleries alone, but the churches, the official buildings, the chapels, and the palaces enriched by the art of hundreds of years.

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1. "A Remembrance," The Rhythm of Life, p. 15.

Alice Meynell's sister, who afterward became Lady Butler, has, in her autobiography, given an interesting account of these visits. In Florence, Genoa, Rome, Bruges, Cologne, London, Paris, and in numerous other art-centers, Alice and Elizabeth Thompson, under the guidance of their father, who was also their tutor, learned to appreciate the beauty of line, color, and form as they found them captured on canvas or imprisoned in the immemorial beauty of bronze and marble. Nor were they casual sightseers such as are to be met in every gallery in Europe, but students learning their history of art from direct sources and under the direction of a singularly fastidious and well-informed teacher.

Later, a still more personal interest tended to keep Alice Meynell eagerly aware of developments in the world of art. Lady Butler, it will be remembered, was the painter of the famous Roll Call, Quatre Bras, and other works of the genre militaire. In her sister's career, as Wilfred Meynell notes in a recent letter, Alice Meynell had a living interest, and frequently "talked" theories of painting with her, discussing in detail the problems of this visual art.<sup>1</sup> It was her sister's fame, says Viola Meynell, which gave Mrs. Meynell her entrée to the art journals. She quickly proved herself to be an original and discriminating critic, with a rare power of recapturing for the reader the spirit and intention of the artist.

For the most part, Mrs. Meynell's criticisms are of contemporary art, although frequent allusions in her work show how familiar she was

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1. Wilfred Meynell, August 4, 1935.

with the great masters of the past. Among the moderns she walked with a sure foot and a discerning eye, and today it is interesting to note how frequently time has vindicated her judgments.

In art as well as in literature Mrs. Maynell was sometimes something of an iconoclast. Thoroughly familiar with the practices of the elder masters, she realized nevertheless that a good custom conventionalized and reduced to a formula is likely to result in a moribund art. For this reason, in her art-criticism she frequently crossed swords with the dictates of that institution which was then looked upon as the official organ of the public taste--the Academy.

Throughout the nineteenth century, it will be remembered, the academies largely regulated not only the teaching of art, but the honors awarded to the artist. As might be expected, in their distribution of patronage they naturally preferred the work of their docile pupils, and the system resulted in a number of conventional pictures most frequently on classical or historical themes. Many quite amiable artists domesticated themselves in Hellas, and if their work lacked the robustness of great art, they at least had the satisfaction of giving the public what it wanted. In England, especially, such a pleasing of the public usually resulted in a lucrative commissions for portraits; and such portraiture in turn gradually degenerated into a kind of sleekness and superficial prettiness. The academies, no longer the custodians of doctrines, became simply the dispensers of exhibition space. Where they might have guided the public taste to an intelligent appreciation of art, they capitulated to the popular demand for a facile anecdote. While artists like Wilkie, Frith,



and Leslie were held up for popular adulation, the recognition of such original painters as Watts, Whistler, Millet, Rousseau, Manet, and Degas was grudging and inadequate.

Against such a system Alice Maynell spoke and wrote frequently. We have already noted her condemnation of the art of the mid-century, and the "official" art of her own time was not, she felt, much more worthy of praise. This was due, in part at least, to the lack of judgment in the selection of pictures. She never visited one of the London galleries, she declared, without asking herself when real discrimination was to be evinced in one of those exhibits--a selection "wide as regards manner, stringent as regards merit, a selection generous, delicate, inflexible, sensitive, austere."<sup>1</sup>

At least part of the depressing effect of the official exhibitions was the result, she felt, of a lack of skill in hanging the pictures. "It is hard to understand," she wrote in 1897, "why even the Academy carpenters could not do better than hang the walls of Burlington House as they are hung this year."<sup>2</sup> She deplored the "scrap-screen" effect which such clumsy hanging produced: "It remains possible that no kind or degree of beauty is desired or referred to by a great part of the public in their visits to the Academy...In practice, the very fact of the exhibition is a protest against the convention that beauty is an aim of popular art. A

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1. "The New Gallery," Tablet, June 21, 1890.

2. "The Royal Academy," Tablet, May 15, 1897. p. 783.

well massed up and mapped out with pictures, with their various scales and their harsh neighborhoods, is a little uglier than a tract of suburban land set with gasmeters as seen from a railway, for the last-named pageant has at least a gradation and mystery. The householder, or his wife and daughter, have set up something like an imitation of the exhibition effect in the scrapscreen which is sometimes seen in the English home, with the added grace of various angles and obliquities in the setting on of the scraps. The hangers of Academy pictures still place the horizons of all the pictures in their galleries uniformly parallel with the horizon of the earth; but otherwise their show is a scrapscreen in effect, and therefore in aesthetic value as a whole. The beauty of single pictures avails nothing to mitigate the general truth that an exhibition is an addition to the ugly and discordant things of a congested world.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, she felt that artists who had something original to offer were not treated fairly by the average run of reviewers. The press, she declared, had done such artists "various and mingled injustice." "The Academicians and Associates," she wrote, "claim the most critical apoc, and their pictures tell stories--a fair sort of light reading." Thus, descriptions of the works of Sir John Gilbert, Vincent Cole, or Frank Dicksee were all very well for people who wanted nothing more than pictorial anecdotes, yet the pen which, with so much facility, could set forth the motives of these painters, invariably faltered when it was called upon to really criticize. "Precisely where there is a sense of mystery,

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1. "Royal Academy (Second Notice,)" Tablet, May 14, 1892.

a craft, something exciting an attitude at least of attention from the layman," she wrote, "there the critic gaily gives judgment...He tells the painter---the painter who has just come to town with something still upon him of that country air, that sea-light, that last summer's sun in which he has made his intent studies---that his tones are false and his figures are chalked all over...Or if the writer gives praise, it is praise preceded and succeeded by admiration for things that accurately contradict every truth of nature and every principle of art of which the young painter is convinced."<sup>1</sup>

Her own method of reviewing the exhibitions was something of an innovation. Instead of joining the chorus of comment on the official painters--the Academicians and Associates whose works had achieved an easy popularity--she devoted her columns, principally at least, to the groups of more original painters in whom she found the vitality of the year's art, and who, despite their faults and limitations, represented the living relations of art to nature.

Her method was surprisingly successful and was immediately adopted by the outstanding critics, so that she was able to write in 1889: "To avoid platitudes we last year devoted our Academy notice to what was noticeable, giving the preference to the work of those painters who, whether for the novelty of their names or the unaccustomed look of their technique, or the claims of the Academicians, would assuredly not be the heroes of the usual newspaper articles. Our example, breaking with precedent, has had an unexpected following. The only authoritative criticism

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1. "Royal Academy (First Notice)," May 10, 1890.

have this season set aside almost the whole body of Academicians and Associates, chiefly because their work is, to phrase it gently, continuous, but also for the frank reason that, as regards all the qualities in the appreciation of which the public should look to the press for a certain instruction, the official work of the Academy offers no text."<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that the conventional painter of the nineteenth century too often used his Academy distinctions as a kind of proof of his ability to paint expensive portraits. The system was pernicious. "The gallery," says Mrs. Maynell, "is used as a market for the traffic between sitter and portrait painter. It advertises the artist who can paint honorable success, in official robes if possible, and cheerful beauty in evening dress after a manner that shall be perfectly intelligible to the friends of the successful and beautiful."<sup>2</sup> It is to be remembered that here she is discussing the secondary portrait painter, the mediocre artist. Great portraiture, she felt, was an art too rarely achieved in the modern world. "Portrait painting," she wrote in 1891, "has always been the finest art of great schools and great times. But undeniably it has another aspect. It serves the most rudimentary of vanities and the most elementary of ambitions in those it deems to a trivial immortality. And it ministers to the commonest and least liberal form of human curiosity---the inarticulate and unintelligent, yet strangely keen, curiosity of women about women.

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1. "The Royal Academy," Tablet, May 11, 1889.

2. "The Portrait Painters' Society," Tablet, August 15, 1891.

There is no manner of art more perilously easy to vulgarize. And in the present state of painting, of society and ambition, to say so much is to acknowledge that a contemporary portrait exhibition can hardly be other than flagrant, ordinary, and showy, at least by a majority of the pictures.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the attitude of the woman who thus sat for her portrait added little to the charm of the picture. "In England," says Mrs. Maynell, "the ideal of sitting for a portrait seems to have descended from the Queen of diamonds; the queens of mere nations held their roses with almost the same denial of action, but they did not often attain to that look, which if not so much a look of solitude as an expression of complete indifference to solitude or society, and of an undemonstrative independence on the part of the sitting queen in regard to all outer conditions whatever. The ceremony of being painted was more than enough, and thought and distraction were alike put away for the time."<sup>2</sup>

Even the French painter, Carolus-Duran, who had modernized Ingres' maxim, "drawing is the probity of art"---for drawing to Duran meant not only contour but a rich modelling in color---was not wholly successful in his portraiture, though even at his most superficial he could not wholly divest his work of charm. Mrs. Maynell has stated the case against him in an article in Merry England in 1884. "Carolus-Duran," she wrote, "contributed to last year's Academy a portrait which was, in round terms, everything which a woman's portrait ought not to be. No pomp of executive show was spared; no research of color. The sitter moved across her drawing

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1. Ibid.

2. "Portraits," Pall Mall Gazette, October 7, 1896.

room and the painter's accomplished brush had movement also in its work. But in face and form...there was no sensibility, no thought, and---a want which would affect the painter more nearly if he were conscious of it---no true distinction. To no woman painted by Carolus-Duran has Nature been "both law and impulse."<sup>1</sup> On the whole, Mrs. Maynell felt that the French influence in portraiture was not altogether beneficial; "It is significant," she writes, "that while French pictures over here have done us nothing but good in all other branches of art, yet in this one matter the artist who has for more than ten years been the Laureate painter of women's portraits in France, shows us but an evil example."<sup>2</sup>

They were, however, portrait painters of undeniable distinction in England. One of the foremost of these, John Singer Sargent, had, in his early years, studied under Carolus-Duran in Paris. Sargent's portraiture represented almost the acme of the neo-academic mode. His pictures were swift, authoritative, unfailingly brilliant. Moreover he proved himself to be observant and vigilant; and there was also in his work a quality that was "something more than observation, and something more than perception---insight."<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Maynell regarded him as belonging to the family of Velasquez, indeed as his chief modern heir, though Sargent, of course, was hardly such a reticent magician of the brush as was the older painter. "Sargent," she declared, "is not distinctively a colorist, although he has

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1. "Views and Reviews," Merry England, February, 1884, p. 282.

2. Ibid.

3. Introduction to The Works of John Singer Sargent.

truly exquisite color, whether in his wonderful flesh or in his whole system of shadows, or in some beautiful blue of a decorative sky...His color is rather something on the way to some beauty and truth of value and relation. Nature is full of passages of mystery, lapses of light and lapses of detail...There are in all natural scenes under our eyes a hundred opportunities for pausing on the beauty of these retreats; the painter visibly delights in them---the colorist chiefly for their color. Mr. Sargent has not this delight passionately though his chief felicity is to be found in perfect relations and in subtle modelling."<sup>1</sup>

She admired Sargent's ability to depict all the incidents of the individual face---its health, its consciousness, its personality. But even more than that did she praise the discerning eye that was able to capture the subtle and delicate signs of race in the facial contours. "It is evident," she writes, "that Mr. Sargent has keen sight for the signs of the races; there is, as it were the look of Spain in his Jaleo, something neither Italian nor Oriental, but proper to the spirit of the populace of this one peninsula, a somewhat deep-toned gaiety, a laugh in grave notes, and a kind of defiance."<sup>2</sup> In the Javanese Dancer she found the flat-footed, flat-handed grace of the extreme East rendered with a delightful, amused, and sympathetic appreciation. Likewise, in the portrait of Theodore Roosevelt, Sargent managed to capture the look of America, the national habit in the figure and the head. No caricaturist,

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

she felt, had ever attempted this aspect because the real signs of nation and race are too fine and too good for the more robust humor of burlesque. In like manner, she observed, Sargent painted the Englishwoman "with all the accents, all the negatives, all the slight things that are partly elegant, partly dowdy...that remove her, farther than any other woman, from the peasant and the land, farther than even an artificial Parisian. Mr. Sargent," she notes, "perceives these keenly, never forcing the signs, for force would destroy anything so delicate."<sup>1</sup>

She admired, too, the composition in his group pictures, particularly in his two great groups of three: that of the Ladies Ashmun in open daylight against a sky; and that of the Misses Hunter backed by a dark, close screen, with the chief brightness in the faces. "Style, light, and life," says Mrs. Maynell, "are in these radiant pictures, with all the qualities of construction and execution that have combined to bring about such a triumph. In painting the three figures in white with a bright cloud beyond, Mr. Sargent has achieved such a success as no putting together of flattering colors could accomplish. Perhaps so much white---here and there white in touches--on the dresses reduces to some secondary degree the brilliancy of the flesh, for there is nothing beyond white so set forth." Still greater beauty, she felt, belonged to the interior group, The Misses Hunter. The picture, she said, "glows gently in the softer light touching the three heads with their degrees of brown hair. The

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1. Ibid.



composition is as strong as it is bold and buoyant, the construction has a large base, and the eye is filled with the great circumference of the outflowing dresses, but the base is light as well as large--a painter's manner of building."<sup>1</sup>

But if John Singer Sargent exemplified the Academy tradition at its best, there were among his contemporaries other painter who, though inferior to him in talent, achieved, for a time at least, no small measure of success. Chief among these was Sir Frederick Leighton, who, for a time, was president of the Academy and who was an exponent of the theories of Ingres. Leighton, although he had a passion for linear draughtsmanship, lacked the stirring quality that in Ingres could make mere contour tense and thrilling, and able to record the subtlest tension or relaxation. Leighton's pictures, though beautiful in conception were often devitalized in execution. That Mrs. Maynell realized this defect is shown in her earliest criticism of his work. In his Daphnephoria, a picture Greek in its happiness and sweetness, which depicts a procession of swiftly moving maidens sweeping up from Thebes in full song under the "large lucid blue and white of an heroic sky," she notes that the city of Thebes to the left, and the passage in the center of the picture which comprises the golden armour of the Dioscuri and the sacred doves, are, after all, more attractive and impulsive than the human beauty. "In his painting of flesh," she says, "the artist seems to be aiming at an ideal which is not

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1. "Royal Academy," Pall Mall Gazette, May 5, 1902.

human; this uniform and perfectly shadowless warm tint is true neither to out-door nor to in-door lighting...yet he is able to give some life without broken color."<sup>1</sup> She points out the fact that the leader of the singers, who beats time and holds a golden lyre, has a right arm very much out of proportion, being both too large and too long. Moreover, "the group of virgins lack touches of force or shadow; and the light is not the light of open air, although some attempt is made to represent this by shadowlessness."<sup>2</sup>

In Leighton's Captain Richard Burton she found a much stronger picture. "Why," she asks, "will not Mr. Leighton oftener give us a masculine man? He had delighted himself too long in the smooth langors of his youths and maidens; much as we love loveliness we love strength even more." The portrait of Captain Burton had this quality of masculinity to a high degree. "The portrait," says Mrs. Keynell, "is very vigorous; here are broken and living color, thin shadows, loaded lights, massive solidity. The expression is one of power in repose, the fittest expression for lasting art. We do not like a transitory expression in a portrait, nor any kind of violence, nor any kind of feebleness, nor any kind of triviality...There is a universal human dignity too often all but lost or at least hidden in life, but which a noble portrait is bound to recognize."<sup>3</sup>

But Leighton did not often paint in this manner. His Captive Andromache, for example, Mrs. Keynell found to be very artificial, though

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1. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 6, 1876.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.

refined and fastidious in execution. She recognized in the composition "beauty of line, a flowing together, a concurrence, a long-deliberated antithesis" governing the groups, each figure of which was perfectly posed, yet the whole effect was somewhat too extreme. "Not so," she says, "look the great figures of a Phidian frieze, too simple for attitude, but moving with the more dignity natural to noble form"<sup>1</sup>

Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema was even less happy in his efforts. The mild nostalgia in his pictures, the languid drawing, and the multiplicity of his colors produced a singularly dull ensemble that called up only a faint echo of the classic times he wished to portray. Mrs. Maynell saw in him nothing but a master of surface and texture, yet she observed truly that there was nothing tourmenté about his work nor did he overly obtrude his dexterity. She noted one of his characteristic colors, a green which he generally used close to white and which was his own discovery; celadon, which was the nearest approach that the rest of the world could make to it, being yet not near it.<sup>2</sup> In his picture "The Roses of Heliogabalus," however, she found a disagreeable discord of blue sky with a shower of pink and crimson roses. "Perhaps," she wrote, "some gardeners have produced harsh pink roses, but here the sky is cold; hence the harshness is exaggerated. Usually his flowers are good yet these are not roses but rose-petals, flowers disorganized, a mass of spots of various degrees of pinkness, and sooth to say, they are silly." The emperor and his party

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1. "The Royal Academy-II," Tablet, May 19, 1888.

2. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 6, 1876.

she found "expressionless, uninterested, simply abhorrent."<sup>1</sup>

A painter of more flexible talent was W.Q. Orchardson, who brought to the old human interest themes a fine insight and an expert craftsmanship. His chief artistic gift was the ability to see nature pictorially; his one wish was to represent simply and straightforwardly what his eye observed. Hence came his characteristic quality of "breadth" in painting, which resulted from his ability to distinguish clearly that which belonged to light from that which belonged to shade. Mrs. Maynell found too, that his color, always tender and strong, took on, in such a picture as Autumn, a new delicacy. "It is more than pretty," she wrote, "and more than brilliant; it is also curiously original, having been studied in no school and learned by no rules. In Autumn the subtle, soft muslin garment worn by the girl is consummately delicate, the tints being almost visionary passages of pearl. The fineness of these tones and colors is, in this instance made more valuable by a surrounding yellowness which would seem, however, to be a somewhat strained interpretation of nature."<sup>2</sup>

Orchardson's later efforts she found to be of a more masculine and a more serious tone. She felt that his work was to be commended for its possession of "that quality of distinctiveness which has been rare enough in the British school." "His mission," says Mrs. Maynell, "seems to be to teach repose---also rare. That often-mentioned 'breadth' is chiefly a repose in his manner of seeing lights and shades where others might

1. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 19, 1888.

2. "William Quiller Orchardson, R.A.," Magazine of Art, Vol. IV, 1881-1882.

fidget with a hundred half tones. Precisely so with composition. Who does not know the devices of that school which is afraid of an inch of calm canvas, and which leaves a Bible casually lying on the floor in one direction, a cabbage and a kitten in another, and a baby accidentally strewn elsewhere? Mr. Orchardson has convinced the world that a torment of accessories does not make for the dignity or the right naturalness of art. Englishmen, who seem to have for ages exacted from their architects the greatest possible numbers of windows, have now begun to appreciate the beauty and value of some spaces of blank wall; and if they have learned the same lesson in pictures, Mr. Orchardson has been among their principal teachers."<sup>1</sup>

From Edwin Abbey's studio at Morgan Hall in Fairport, there came periodically pictures of knights and ladies from the great legends and dramas of English literature. The pictures, depicting familiar scenes, charmed the English public, and in her Royal Academy notice for May, 1896, Mrs. Meynell notes that the most loudly proclaimed "picture of the year" was Abbey's Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and Lady Anne. The cause of its popularity, she believed, lay not only in its choice of subject, but also in its obvious beauty of color and its brilliant, though artificial form. Abbey's mannerism of color, writes Mrs. Meynell, "is that of modern Flanders, and very emphatic and severe. The forms are traced by a dark outline." Likewise, she observes, the painter "has taken a picturesque and outrageous costume as literally and gravely as did Velasquez, clothing the figure of his principal figure in an enormous headdress and a

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1. Ibid.

and a great dress standing with cloth of gold, the whole seven feet or so of costume being covered with a huge veil of black transparent gauze for mourning."<sup>1</sup> As drama, however, she felt that the picture was sufficiently strong, and on the whole, that the scene passed according to Shakespeare.

Continuing his Shakespearean theme, Abbey, in the following year, exhibited his version of the "mouse-trap" scene in Hamlet. Here again his picture, glowing with reds and browns and a really wonderful white, possessed the more obvious kind of splendor so greatly admired by the people. Nevertheless, Mrs. Maynell found the painter's symbolic intention in placing the king and queen and all the company of the play in lurid colors and Ophelia alone in white to be rather irritating. "We do not admire so cheap an ingenuity," she wrote, "and it does not flatter us that we have perceived it."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a certain weakness of drawing marred the general effect of the picture. In the figure of Hamlet reclining, with his back turned, and looking over his shoulder at the king, Abbey has fallen into "the disheartening and almost abject fault of failing to make one figure look upon another upon which the gaze is intended to be riveted." "Hamlet's eye," says Mrs. Maynell, "weakly does not attain the King's face. As for the other eyes in the picture, the painter has put them all out on principle. Those of Claudius and Gertrude are extinguished by their own pallor and reflect no light; Ophelia's (being also white eyes) are effaced by the strong light turned as by a lime-light upon her sole figure and face.

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1. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 9, 1896.

2. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 15, 1897.

She is ill-favored beyond the bounds of probability besides, and her waist has been copied, perhaps with a loyal reference to Jubilee fashions, from the waists of the Pre-Raphaelites, and even then with such exaggeration. The drawing has been perversely disregarded; for you cannot look upon Hamlet without wishing to pick him up by the head and prove to him that his dangling legs have no bones in them."<sup>1</sup>

The painters whom we have just been discussing---Sargent, Leighton, Orchardson, Alma-Tadema, Abbey---represented the freer tendencies among the Academicians. Their concept of art enabled them to conform to the spirit of the Academy and at the same time to express a certain individuality in their work. This was not true, however, of other highly individualistic groups of painters who refused to compromise what they believed to be the probity of their art with the shackling conventions of the Academy. The Pre-Raphaelites represent a primitivistic phase of the revolt. These Romantic mediaevalists, feeling the staleness of the English traditions, sought inspiration in the freshness and variety of the Italian artists before the Renaissance---Giotto, Gossoli, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio. Nevertheless, Mrs. Meynell looked upon the movement as literary rather than pictorial, even where the painting of pictures was in question. "Inasmuch as it was the result of reading and scholarship rather than that of observation which belongs essentially to the vividly realized moment," she wrote, "the movement was undoubtedly literary, and the published sonnet in which the promoters opened the heart of their intentions, dealt less with

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1. Ibid.

the projects of the brush and the chisel than with those of the pen."<sup>1</sup> Although she believed that it would be harsh to call the archaism of the school an affectation, yet she felt that at least there was an element of constant self-consciousness in it.

In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings she saw the intensity of the dramatic expression of passion realized.<sup>2</sup> But she felt that his work was distinctively that of a poet: "His poems and his pictures," she said, "are a poet's." She believed, however, that his two talents were interactive: "Nevertheless, his own best art of words has always obviously gained some beauty, some riches, some lovely power, from the habit which the use of color and pencil must have kept alive in him---the habit of making definite mental pictures. He has preserved this, and yet has foregone nothing of the literary and poetic power over thought and emotion."<sup>3</sup>

But William Holman Hunt she believed, was the artist who in his work most consistently exemplified the doctrines of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. "Holman Hunt," she wrote, "was a Pre-Raphaelite, and what he was he has remained. Some of those he inspired to join him have, in their own careers swiftly passed through the phases found in the art of a nation. They had their own private and personal Trecento, their own Quattrocento.

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1. "The Brush, The Chisel, and the Pen," Art Journal, February, 1882, p. 85.
  2. "The Rossettis," July Exhibitions, Pall Mall Gazette, July 9, 1902.
  3. "The Brush, the Chisel, and the Pen," op. cit.



their "Culmination of Art" in a Roman school of their own---all this or something that represents it. But Holman Hunt has remained at one period wherein he found life and truth enough to last."<sup>1</sup> His Rienzi, a picture full of story and incident, was the first distinctively Pre-Raphaelite painting, and, as Mrs. Maynard pointed out, it was at Hunt's suggestion that his fellow artists turned "from sketch contemporary art to Florence, Siena, and Umbria in the day of their increase."<sup>2</sup> Whatever Hunt lacked in imagination and flexibility, he at least possessed the quality of sincerity. "He never imitated medievalism for the sake of pose," wrote Mrs. Maynard. "The thoughts of the heart and the works of the hands of Holman Hunt are proofs of a distinguished sincerity."

Another artist who deviated but little from the wistful medievalism of the early brotherhood was Edward Burne-Jones who hardly once in his public career, was treated with temperance, since he was worshipped, for his many faults, by a minority, and scorned, for his best qualities, by a majority. The truth about Burne-Jones, Mrs. Maynard believed, was that he had some of an artist's true powers, and lacked others of equal importance. "His drawing," she notes, "is so incredibly impotent that he cannot present a full face which shall have even a semblance of construction, and the features of which shall not be as arbitrarily and unconvincingly placed as those of a face drawn by a child. And he has no scruple in repeating a face not only in several pictures, but in ten or

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1. "William Holman Hunt," Art Annual for 1893, p. 1.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

twelve of the figures of a single picture. These," she asserts, "are two grave defects---one involuntary and the other partly voluntary---which must prevent his ranking among masters."<sup>1</sup> His good qualities, as she pointed out, were such a sense of the composition of lines as has seldom been equaled, a fine feeling for beauty, a frequent dignity of attitude, and a splendor of color, which last, however, was somewhat intermittent.

As a painter, she felt that he bid for all kinds of imperfection by the fact that his work might be equally well done, and even better done, by other means than those of the brush. Enamel or some other form of jeweller's work, she believed, would have served his turn even better, yet she did not agree with those critics who subjected Burne-Jones' whole work to a censure that should rightly be reserved for his brush work. "A man's invention in line and attitude," she declared, "is not to be reviled because he knows nothing of the dragging of paint. The several severities are to be gathered together, not confused; and the judge who possesses them all and holds them to their own work will be a generous judge, full of satisfaction because intent upon several successes."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, she felt that a habit of beauty, a habit of attitude, a habit of foreboding expression which were Burne-Jones' obvious characteristics did not of themselves condemn him to rank with those whose art is altogether ready-made and without separate experience, for the reason that his habit was at least his own and not another's. "It is a parti pris

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1. "Edward Burne-Jones, A.R.A.," Merry England, January, 1893, p. 220.

2. Ibid., p. 222.

resolved upon once for all," she declared, "and the resolution was the one event in his mental history. It may be a little slovenly to draw always the same profile, but the initial choice of the profile was an act of enterprise. It may be sickly to insist upon a mitigated-feminine person to carry the attributes of St. Michael, King Cophetua, or the Angels of the Creation: but the first conviction that the mitigated-femine was all-sufficient for the drama of time and eternity was a matter of some decision."<sup>1</sup>

There is rather delightful humor in her assertion that Burne-Jones has cast a ladies' school for the parts of the heavenly host, taking something more than the licence of theatricals on a prize-day. "But," she avers, "it is a school without the tempers and appetites, the gaiety and unweariness, the tumults and curiosities of the human girl, and in truth, with much more than her beauty, Pietro Perugino does nothing like this. His effeminacy is but love of a certain pose of the standing figure, with the shy and graceful outline of limbs gathered together; the faces of those shrinking saints of his have male gravity that is the contrary of Burne-Jones' sadness."<sup>2</sup>

She felt that his continued reliance on the past for inspiration was a distinct flaw in his art. "The idea and work of the past," she said, "will not be recalled without profound traces of the double journey. Mr. Burne-Jones has made the most deliberate attempt at absolute recall,

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1. Ibid., pp. 222-223.

2. Ibid., p. 223.

and therefore the most complete but reluctant confession of bondage to his day." His allegory, The Wheel of Fortune, for example, had, like so many of its author's works, much of that spirit of imitation which, she believed, was as much a sign of weakness as genuine derivation from the past was a sign of strength. The central figure in the picture, that of Fortune, has, as Mrs. Maynell pointed out, a Mantegna-like dignity of thought, but, she protests, "the young men whom the realistic allegory of the painter has fastened upon the spikes of the wheel (one of them is about to have his realistic bones and muscles crushed, but is showing only a strictly allegorical degree of emotion) have that family likeness among themselves which is so inevitable and so regrettable in Mr. Burne-Jones' art. Why," she asks, "does he not carry his reverent study of the early Italians a little further and reproduce their individualized and separate treatment of the human unit? For he does not generalize man in the fashion of the 'grand style' which refuses to recognize the accidents of personal character. He merely repeats himself."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, there was little convincing emotion in Burne-Jones' art. King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, as she pointed out in 1884, seem to take the pleasure of their mésalliance sadly enough, "but," she notes, "Mr. Burne-Jones' sadness is too evidently caught on the end of his brush to affect us with serious sympathy. This lack of joy has the perhaps unexpected effect of making the subject seem trivial; and the dreary flesh tints of the picture, changing to a glow at the bride's feet only, help to

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1. "The Grosvenor Exhibition," in Reviews and Views, Norrey England, June, 1883, p. 167.

put the figures into a secondary place."<sup>1</sup> The picture, with its splendid golds and silvers and peacock colors, was after all no more than an exquisite bit of handicraft. "Burne-Jones," she complains, "presents us with an accumulation of facts rather than with a summary of truths. He must, no doubt, loathe impressionary art, but the impressionist might accuse him of making inventories."<sup>2</sup>

Then too, he had an unfortunate way of repeating his subjects. "Sir Edward Burne-Jones' Briar Rose," she protested in 1896, "still trails on from year to year, and it is, in every sense, long. Having begun to rearrange the human figure, he has gone on, for there was no reason to stop. If anatomy does not stay him what will?"<sup>3</sup> He might have paused, she observed, to reflect that to give a figure impossible length was, after all, a rather cheap way of attaining elegance---a way that was open to anyone. However, the thought seems never to have occurred to him, and he presents the Princess as a person of immense length, and the spectator perceives it all on a sofa in profile. The attendants also are tall, but, as she notes, "they are folded up and foreshortened in a manner proper to their subordinate importance."<sup>4</sup>

But despite such obvious defects, and despite the fact that his canvases often lack the unity that is achieved only by the living light,

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1. "Reviews and Views," Merry England, June, 1884, p. 136.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. "Royal Academy," Tablet, May 11, 1895, p. 722.

Burne-Jones' work did possess certain praiseworthy qualities. Thus, "the loveliness, the education, the aloofness from vulgar optimism, the sense of line, the gathering of groups, of figures, of draperies, into inviolate repose"---these things, said Mrs. Keynell, often set his drawings in a place of alien honor in the ordinary gallery.

But if it was a pleasure to observe these traits in his work, it was an even greater pleasure to follow him from conditions that suited few of his powers to those that suited all of them. "It is not indeed, strictly speaking, Mr. Jones A.R.A., who affords us the delight," says Mrs. Keynell. "The honors of the Academy were awarded to the oil painter; those of art are given to a man who fills a church window with such free completeness--such liberty yet liberality--of composition, such purity yet temperance of color, such singular grace of line as are revealed true to place, true to conditions, true to method, in the windows designed for East Hampton Church, and in the Angeli Laudantes, and Angeli Ministrantes for Salisbury." In such art she finds Burne-Jones not only a master, but a teacher, and even a maker of laws. So, too, does she find him in every art that by its very conditions prevents the multitudinous detail that he so loved to introduce into his pictures. "His beautiful drawings in which he is persuaded to simplicity," she says, "show his education and the grace of his sense of the figure, and his use of dramatic emotion for the purpose of design: for sweeping a wider curve or folding lines to a flower-like close."

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1. "Edward Burne-Jones, A.R.A.," Merry England, January, 1893, pp. 225-226

As to the drapery in Burne-Jones' pictures, she found it beautiful everywhere, and of such distinction as none except the Greeks had achieved until his day. The mischief done by the "glorious" Roman school of painting, she believed, was nowhere so banalizing, so devitalizing, and so lasting as in the study of drapery. Moreover, in the daily habiliments of the race, drapery, needless to say, ceased with antiquity. "The Middle Ages," says Mrs. Maynell, "chiefly moved by prudery and by her sister, vanity, set up the tailor and the dressmaker, and armed them with scissors as the representatives of the crafts, the uneasy enemies of all the simplicities of nature and the arts. Many kinds of arbitrary beauty were then scattered, spread, ballooned, erected with gold, and enlarged and redoubled by linings; and the skills of painting approved the freak, from Piero della Francesca to Sir Joshua Reynolds."<sup>1</sup> For, as she remarks, it might seem paradoxical to say that a garment that "fits" is a garment arrayed against nature. Nevertheless it is true, for all this tissue, when it is exactly strained across human shoulders, and made as shapely as measuring and precise snipping can make it, is a contradiction to nature—the nature of tissue. For it is not only the figure that has its laws. Other dignities may be lowly in comparison to life, but they exist. As soon as man made cloth, nature gave it laws for its falls and folds. "Subject to the special laws of its conditions," says Mrs. Maynell, "it served the Greek worthily in relation to the energy, the action, and the comedy of that queen of all life, the figure. The tailor of the Middle Ages did not

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1. "Drapery," Pall Mall Gazette, June 22, 1898.

leave it to its natural laws, and, therefore, his constrained velvet, treated now as though it were paper, now as though it were armour, never had the special dignity of its own kind, and never clothed the body of man or woman altogether with nobility...Not so prepared was the tunic of the Winged Victory flying in the wind; nor were the three Fates measured for difference in the girdles lurking at their breasts, or in the web across their folded knees."<sup>1</sup>

In modern times, Burne-Jones was one of the foremost who sought to restore drapery to its own nature, so that it might accompany the nature of the body. What could be done, short of the Greek ideal, he and a few others accomplished. "The falling short," says Mrs. Meynell, "is perhaps defined in the word 'lifeless,' for the Greek drapery of the highest time seems to take fire from the touch and the nearness of the bodily life. But apart from such an outbreak from the heart of its vitality, which was not repeated in any school, there is a semblance of its expressiveness and significance which the modern artistic hand is able to achieve; and for beauty of decorum there are no sweeter lanes than those of the Burne-Jones' folds." True, it is a beauty of the second order, and a beauty that would be disturbed if it were disarranged, holding its security as it does in a conscious suspense. Therefore, she believes, it should perhaps rather be called prettiness than beauty, but even so, it rebukes all other prettiness by the peace, the grace, the composure, of its attitude. Had Burne-Jones allowed for the beauty of accident and fluctuation as they occur in nature, he would have achieved a higher and a truer art. "Watch

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1. Ibid.



the work or play of any natural thing is liberty," advises Mrs. Meynell, "and you will surprise the life---whether original or communicated life, still the life, the motion, and the significance---and life of the first significance is found in the limbs and raiment of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

But the Pre-Raphaelites were not the only group to break with Academic tradition. A remarkable company of artists were those who lived and painted at the little village of Barbizon, near the forest of Fontainebleau in France. These painters, often called the men of 1830, were undoubtedly influenced by the works of Constable which had been exhibited in Paris in 1824 and 1825. Departing from the Academic tradition they did not paint the customary historical pieces, nor compositions inspired by classical legend, but found motifs for their work in the changing beauty of plain and forest, in the simple life of the peasantry, and in the rhythmic changes of the seasons with their accompanying scenes of seed-time, growth, harvest, and rest.

Discussing this group, Mrs. Meynell writes: "Modern art is rather oligarchical than monarchical in its little societies. Few of late have been the single leaders of any reform, the single teachers of any new methods. No man has earned the right to have a school called after him, and thus we often distinguish such schools as there are by the name of a place, and by preference the place is a village---Barbizon by the forest of Fontainebleau, Newlyn over against St. Michael's Mount by the grey sea of Cornwall. The 'School of Barbizon' was no school in the sense of

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1. Ibid.

implying mastership and discipleship, but it was a division, a distinction, a grouping. It expressed the revolt and the renewal without which nothing can be achieved corporately by men bringing enthusiasm to the arts."<sup>1</sup> These renewals, says Mrs. Maymell, have nearly always taken the form of a "return to nature," and the very reason of their occurrence is that the conventions have become dull and inexpressive, and must be rearranged, this readjustment of the relations of art to nature always taking the form of a rapprochement. The Barbizon painters, bent though they were upon making a change in the world, were bent upon doing it for truth's sake rather than for change's sake, and, says Mrs. Maymell, "as little conscious as modern men can be of the epoch-making character of their own mission." Moreover, though they were distinctly individual, they shared in the strength of their mutual aims. "The men of 1830," she writes, "shared principles, impulses, resolves, loves, and labors together. They went back to the forest, back to the fields and the transitory skies, and painted in the open air, waiting on the light and weather. They shared the habit of such work and a faith in its efficacy. They shared also a knowledge of facture---way of doing---which is communicated among comrades. This they had. No young man of them was left to putter and make experiments for himself. They all had temperaments; they all knew how to paint; some conventions every school must have---they had a good one. Therefore they were a company of capable painters. None the less was the genius among them perfectly distinct, absolutely personal, as clearly unlike the ability

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1. "A Group of Great Painters," Art Journal, September, 1890, - p. 283.

of their fellows as though they had been surrounded by incapable painters. Men and women have gone to Barbizon year by year to paint, but there was only one real Barbizon school of landscape and it belonged to 1830."<sup>1</sup>

Corot was easily the chief figure of the school. "Incomparably the most exquisite genius of his time," writes Mrs. Mayne, "Corot was also the most original, and it is impossible to assert that he derived from Constable except as every artist is inevitably the heir of his great predecessors."<sup>2</sup> The early works of Corot held a particular charm for her. She found in their very definiteness and pearl-like purity the same quality of mystery that lurked in the midst of trees and in the least detail of glade and cloud in the pictures of later years. "Nothing," she says, "could be more luminously mysterious than the white walls of houses as Corot painted them, in brooding light, when he was young."<sup>3</sup> Thus, in the painting of the town in Avignon where the foreground growth is exquisitely delicate, as well as in the distant buildings of the Rome from the Pincio, she found this quality exemplified. At least part of this effect, she believed, was due to Corot's habit of working under the peculiar atmospheric conditions of early mornings.

Corot also took the brilliant opportunity of the hours of sleep. In some landscapes of his early manner he has the very light of dreams, and it was surely because he went abroad at the time when sleep and dreams

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1. "French and Dutch Art at the Grafton Gallery," Tablet, Feb. 8, 1896.
  2. "A Group of Great Painters," op. cit., p. 284.
  3. "Old Masters at the Royal Academy," Tablet, January 18, 1896, p. 82.

claimed his eyes that he was able to see so spiritual an illumination. Summer is precious for a painter, because in summer so many of the hours of sleep are also hours of light. He carries the mood of man's night out into the sunshine---Corot did so---and lives the life of night, in all its genius, in the presence of a risen sun. In the only time when the heart can dream of light, in the night of visions, with the rhythmic power of night at its dark noon in his mind, his eyes see the soaring of the actual sun...The summer daybreak was seen by Corot with the extreme perception of the life of night. Here, at last, is the explanation of all the memories of dreams recalled by those visionary paintings, done in earlier years than were those, better known, that are the Corots of all the world. Every man who knows what it is to dream of landscape meets with one of these works of Corot's first manner with a cry, not of welcome only, but of recognition. Here is morning perceived by the spirit of the hours of sleep.<sup>1</sup>

In all of his work, she felt that beauty was at inseparable union with his hand. "We all wish to be reminded," she said, "of cool aspens with the shadowed sides of their leaves between us and a silver sky, or a small delicate distance with its little poplars absorbed by the light, or hillsides with rough foreground grass and slender mounting trees, or skies in which the clouds are but a film, making edges and fringes for the sun. Assuredly some natural things are good in their place and in their fact, but we do not desire them for that treasury, separated from season and imitation, which is art and memory. Corot painted nothing but what has part in remembrance and hope."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise she felt that he habitually worked with such gentle differences of tone that a careless eye might be surprised to find his soft grayish pictures of autumn so utterly unlike his soft grayish pictures of

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1. "The Hours of Sleep," The Spirit of Place.
  2. "Winter Exhibitions," Tablet, February 8, 1892.

spring. His canvas Autumn, for example, is full of an autumn bloom and an autumn light, rich with the color of plums and of fading woods. But what Corot could do with exceeding richness of color, she declared, could best be judged by such a picture as the Road to Gruyère, which is painted with extraordinary depth of sunshine, yet is low throughout in tone. "Dark," she writes, "is an ill word to use for such purposes, yet it must be endured for lack of a better. Corot's sunshine has a low tone of splendor.

Especially felicitous, too, was his treatment of skies. "Corot," she says, "has painted so many southwest winds that one might question whether he ever painted, in his later manner at least, any others. His skies are thus in the act of flight, with lower clouds outrunning the higher, the farther vapours moving like a fleet out at sea, and the nearer like dolphins. In his Classical Landscapes: Italy, the master has indeed for once a sky that seems at anchor, or at least that moves with 'no pace perceived.' The vibrating wings are folded, and Corot's wind, that flew through so many springs, summers, and Septembers for him, that was mingled with so many aspen-leaves, that strewed his forests with wood for the gatherer, and blew the broken lights into the glades, is charmed into stillness, and the sky into another kind of immortality. Nor are the trees in this antique landscape the trees so long intimate with Corot's south-west wind, so often entangled with his uncertain twilights. They are as quiet as the cloud, and such as the long and wild breezes of Romance have never shaken or embraced."<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Winds of the World," The Color of Life, pp. 25-26.

Three of Corot's associates--Daubigny, Diaz, and Jules Dupré--- though clever artists, were not, in her estimation, men of genius. Daubigny she regarded as a thorough art-workman who knew his office as a painter; but between this and the luminous genius of Corot there was, she averred, an unfathomable distance. Of a little lower rank was the work of Diaz who in his time was a leader. Yet his was a common if artistic skill. "The fact is," she asserts, "that mediocrity in France is apt to look splendidly well. It is well-taught, it is dignified, it is temperate, it has enterprise. It has qualities that interest and delight the educated French. If we, unaccustomed to the exotic manner of it, do not recognize it for mediocrity, it is little wonder, seeing that neither in its own country is it recognized. We are not used to seeing mediocrity look so little vulgar, and therefore we do not give it its true name. The French on the other hand are so well used to it that they have ceased to know at once the distinction between things that are both alike removed from vulgarity--genius and mediocrity well-taught."<sup>1</sup>

A far more arbitrary deviation from Academic conventions was made by the Impressionists who believed that artistic value does not grow out of an entire aesthetic experience, but consists rather in brief, intense states of vision. They tried to bring to each survey of nature the precious freshness of a first time, to observe passively the changing loveliness of an instant, and to transfer the impression to canvas while it was still

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1. "Old Masters at the Royal Academy," op. cit.

vivid in the mind. This, in brief, was the programme of the Impressionists. Under the leadership of Édouard Manet, a figure painter, and Claude Monet, a landscapist, they cast aside the old academic formulas and painted nature as they actually saw it. Manet who rediscovered from his study of Velasquez, Hals, and Tintoretto the secret of synthetic painting, began to create form in color rather than to merely chart it in line as was done in the more conventional method. Claude Monet, who was especially interested in problems of illumination, declared that the light is "the principal personage" in any picture. The world to him was a swirling torrent of light; and art was the transcription onto canvas of its perpetual flux. Analyzing sunlight, shadow, and natural color, he perceived that what, for example, seemed to be green in nature could not be rendered by green paint, for there were other colors in the green--blue, red, violet, yellow. To produce a more accurate effect than was customary, therefore, he placed small areas of pure unmixed color side by side on the canvas, allowing the eye of the spectator to blend them at the right focal distance. Such a practice was regarded as revolutionary at the time, yet the doctrines of the Impressionists prevailed, and modifications of <sup>the</sup> procedure of broken color have transformed the art of painting.

As is almost inevitable in every movement, many second-rate painters thronged to the ranks of the Impressionists. For these Mrs. Meynell had a word of warning. "Not without significance," she said, "is the Spanish nationality of Velasquez. In Spain was the point put upon honor; and

Velasquez was the first Impressionist."<sup>1</sup> Thus he claimed, at least implicitly, a delicate reliance on his trustworthiness, and while others were content merely to save their artistic consciences, he safeguarded the point of honor. His example, Mrs. Moynell believed, should be followed by the later Impressionists:

Because Impressionism is so free, therefore it is doubly bound. Because there is none to arraign it, it is a thousand times responsible. To undertake this art for the sake of its privileges without confessing its obligations--or at least without confessing them up to the point of honor--is to take a vulgar freedom: to see immunities precisely where there are duties, and an advantage where there is a bond. A very mob of men have taken Impressionism upon themselves in this our later day. It is against all probabilities that more than a few among these have within them the point of honor. In their galleries we are beset with a dim distrust. And to distrust is more humiliating than to be distrusted. How many of these landscape-painters, deliberately rash, are painting the truth of their own impressions? An ethical question as to loyalty is easily answered; truth and falsehood as to fact are happily for the intelligence of the common conscience, not hard to divide. But when the dubium concerns not fact, but artistic truth, can the many be sure that their candour, their scruple, their delicate equipoise of perceptions, the vigilance of their apprehension, are enough?...There is too much reason to divine that a certain number of those who aspire to derive from the greatest of masters, have no temperaments worth speaking of, no point of view worth seizing, no vigilance worth waiting for, no mood worth waylaying.<sup>2</sup>

The Impressionist, therefore, must assert nothing except on the point of artistic honor. He must remember that while "the majority can tell ordinary truth, they should not trust themselves for truth extraordinary. They should hesitate to produce work that appeals to the last judgment, which is the judgment within."<sup>3</sup>

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1. "The Point of Honor," The Rhythm of Life, p. 49.

2. Ibid., p. 52.

3. "Whistler," Nearly England, January, 1888, p. 581.



One of the foremost of the Impressionists in England was the American painter James McNeill Whistler who, departing from the frank solidity of his earliest manner, produced many pictures which may be regarded as trials de force of arrangement and texture. In his last phase he was as much influenced by Velasquez as he was by the Japanese. One finds in these later pictures an ambience of grey air, an envelopment; and form is arrived at only by inference. Discussing this aspect of his work, Mrs. Keynell writes: "Whistler has no atmosphere, no light. Instead of air he studies various kinds of fog---and studies them most delicately; and his 'values' are the relative powers of darkness, not of light. He seldom paints a sky."<sup>1</sup> It was here, she felt that he differed most widely from the usual methods of the Impressionists---and as a matter of fact, it is exactly here that he parts company with Manet who, although working along similar lines is always explicit. "The best achievement of the Impressionist school," writes Mrs. Keynell, "is the rendering of air---not air made palpable and comparatively easy to paint by fog---but atmosphere which is the medium of light."<sup>2</sup> Thus in his "Chevalet" pictures, she finds that their much vaunted "mystery" is a common one---the mystery that "lurks at the end of every London street, and the heart of which any man may pluck out by a short progress in an omnibus." "But the mystery of 'live air,'" she writes, "that invests the natural world with multitudinous movement as with a garment, he ignores."<sup>3</sup>

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1. "Whistler," Merry England, January, 1888, p. 581.

2. Ibid.

3. "Whistler's Pictures in Bond Street," Tablet, April 2, 1892, p. 522.

Whistler's "arrangements" and "nocturnes" she regarded less as pictures than as fine decorative plaques. "Such in fact they are," she asserts, "by reason of the painter's feeling for tone as distinct from value."<sup>1</sup> "Tone" she took to be the relative depth and lightness of any color; "value" to represent the amount of light upon an object, and especially the relative emphasis which that light seems to take from the nearness or distance of the things which it illumines. "With such values," she says, "Whistler declined to concern himself, but his sense of decorative tone is exquisite."

To Whistler's feeling for tone, she declared, he added a rare sense for the right placing of objects, a sense almost as fine as that of the Japanese--as fine perhaps as an Occidental artist could possibly attain. "This quality," she declared, "is, we believe, the most distinguishing note of his talent. In fact, we may take him as a teacher of the Oriental art of separate decoration--the art which comes none too soon to save us from the utter weariness of decoration by series derived from Greece. Decoration by series and repetition, with the poor relief of interchange, has become a dead dullness to us; Japan and Mr. Whistler offer us the life and interest of accident and incident, exquisitely managed."<sup>2</sup>

Even more concerned than the Impressionists with the problem of light were the plain-air painters. Directly influenced by French artists, and for the most part trained in French studios, they were attracted to the

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1. "Whistler," Merry England, op. cit.

2. Ibid., p. 588.

fishing village of Newlyn in Cornwall by the possibility of painting out of doors all the year round, and even more by the equable gray climate which allowed the study of the model in diffused daylight. "For the chief note of the bank of artists who formed the Newlyn school," writes Mrs. Keynall, "is, of course, that they are following in England the methods long practiced in France---vivid and simple study of nature. Nature had been studied before for form and color and shadow but hardly for light, or for that unity which has so fitly been named the 'impression' .... The Newlyn painters are in the minority, but they differ essentially from the rest of English painters, and differ from one another accidentally by all the charming accidents of their individual character. In spite of the latter distinction, their separateness from the majority has been recognized....That they have taken on themselves the responsibilities of truthfulness, that they work with sincerity and directness, that they have devoted themselves to the subtle study of light rather than to the obvious study of color, and that they have style but not manner---these characteristics are sufficiently distinctive in England at the present time."<sup>1</sup>

The Newlyn painters, too, she declared, were particularly fortunate in the site they had chosen for their work---the western coast of Cornwall which has, she says, "the charming distinction of being between two seas---a southern sea between us and the sun with the atmosphere over it soft and broken, seen against the light; and a northern sea upon which the sun shines flat, abrupt, positive, and dark with color; distinct in its horizon, its

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1. "Newlyn," The Art Journal, April, 1888, pp. 98-99.

profound blue breaking into fine shining lines of foam...Over this north sea the midsummer sun makes wave and sky look like a vision, or like the heavens and waters of a dream, because the color is so steady and profound, and we are unaware of the multitudinous atmosphere which is the breath of England. Here we do not see this atmosphere for the full light is upon it. ...But towards the southern sea there is innumerable shadow. Every particle of the tender English air has its darkened side toward our eyes--- shadow perceptible as a general mystery, not marring the light, rather adding a quality of luminosity that is more radiant than light."<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest members of the plain-air school to win recognition for his art was Stanhope Forbes with his Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach. "When the reviewers had learned from the artists," says Mrs. Meynell, "how beautiful was this picture, they in turn told the public and awakened a reluctant interest in a work too true and refined to delight eyes accustomed to the fictions of English painting."<sup>2</sup> She used "fictions" not in the sense of narrative, but fictions of a more technical kind. "We must be compelled to acknowledge," she writes, "that there is a habit of feigning among the exhibitors in the galleries---a conventionality sometimes personal to each painter, and therefore not altogether so dull as conventions that have been inherited or adopted, but still dull enough as truth is never. One popular artist has his way of forcing the tone of his work in <sup>the</sup> manner of an orchestra tuned high for the sake of brilliancy.

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1. Ibid., p. 97.

2. Ibid., p. 99.

Another systematically neglects the sky and all its perspectives, and the construction---or rather organization---that is in the simplest sky, probably with the intent of making the abundant detail of the landscape more conspicuous. Such things," she avers, "are surely manner and not style. For in looking closer at the brilliant flesh of one painter we perceive the corrupt execution and the coarse yellows and whites by which he achieves his brightness; and the other has, after all, a dull picture to show us, in which no living lights and airs move between the clouds, and the distance reveals no design in the firmament. Less interesting painters have a habit of feigning violent color in nature, where a simple pictorial sight perceives grey--grey that is various indeed, but with varieties depending upon their limitations. In each case of manner or fiction, the result is an absence of vitality. Vitality ---vitalité is not lost. It expresses precisely the Newlyn quality, though that is too trivial a word; it is of course more than a quality that is lost, or rather foregone, by conventions."<sup>1</sup>

Stanhope Forbes, making use of none of these allusions, shows himself, says Mrs. Meynell, as a colorist of extreme refinement, and of a moderation that does not preclude a singular completeness. That is, his is a comprehensive color, fuller, richer, more multitudinous than appears at first glance, but still characterized by fidelity to nature. "And this charming restraint and control," Mrs. Meynell asserts, "is evident in that study of light which is the motive of his work; here, too, he has no

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1. Ibid., pp. 99-100.

surprises of luminosity for us, no translucent passages where nature has her simple opaque daylight, no abrupt contrasts where she shows delicate comparisons. And this loyalty gives to the Fish Sale its beautiful reality, its distance, the measurable remoteness of the quiet horizon, the perspective of shore and sea, every hand's breadth of which has its own place; the lovely tints of the fish, the distinct and familiar humanity of each figure."<sup>1</sup>

Another of the Newlyn painters, Mr. F. Bramley, achieved a similar success in his Hopeless Dawn. Several members of the school had attempted interiors with grey daylight coming in at a little window, but in Bramley's picture the light is cooler and truer, and the interior tones exquisitely valued. The subject of the picture is a tragic one, depicting as it does an old and a young woman, at cold daybreak, who have watched all night for a boat. The mother droops over the wife who has fallen across her knees. Mrs. Keynoll notes the careful and energetic draughtsmanship in the picture, the hands and all the passages in the drawing of the two figures being singularly beautiful. She praises, too, the careful avoidance of sentimentality: "No ready-made feeling is here; nothing woolly or un-experienced. There is conviction in the clasp of the hands and in the whole expression of the broken action of the women." Moreover, she says, "the picture is an organic thing, studied in its ensemble, and not a dull combination; its technique is a delight, so direct, simple, and distinguished is the execution, so true are the atmosphere, the tones, the planes of

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1. Ibid., p. 101.

distance---everything that makes a picture vital."<sup>1</sup>

In H.E. Detmold's Departure of the Fishing Fleet, she found a sensitive study of a tranquil sea. "It is to be wished," she writes, that such calm waters were oftener painted. The movement of seas in agitation is more obvious indeed, but movement is not their monopoly. A calm sea moves in a subtler but more momentous manner. Some hidden and profound impetus gives it a shock from beneath, and reflections that had 'trembled but never passed away' are scattered in such fantastic flashes as no fancy could have drawn, and this with hardly a perceptible fracture of the lovely lucent surface like a pearl."<sup>2</sup>

But aside from the more easily classified of the Impressionists and their followers, few of the progressive modern painters have escaped their influence, at least insofar as the problem of light is concerned. While they may not adopt the exact technique of the Impressionist, they at least follow him in that they accept the vision of light as of paramount importance. Such a painter for example, was Tuke, who in his August Blue, says Mrs. Keynoll, has involved his whole picture in sunshine and air. "light and atmosphere," she writes, "exist between the spectator and the figures, between the figures and the distance. Air that is made a little loose air by the presence of fog is obviously an easy matter to paint, and the man who paints it gets praise for his 'atmosphere.' Mr. Tuke does a far more masterly act with his expression of the air on an

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1. "The Royal Academy-I," Tablet, May 12, 1888. p. 755.

2. "Newlyn-II," Art Journal, May, 1889, p. 140.

August afternoon, far in the mistless and smokeless summer."<sup>1</sup> In this picture of boys bathing from a boat that has pulled out into the sunny waters, and that has blue sky above and blue sea around it, the golden sunshine is full upon the nude figures, one of which, says Mrs. Meynell, "stands up with spring and poise that is more or less lost under every form of clothing." Thus it rebukes one of the greatest faults in modern costuming, which, she believes, disguises the exquisite lines and modelings of the human figure under inartistically designed garments. "It is in that most vital quality of obviously unstable equilibrium---more or less obscured by anything, however slight, that enlarges the foot or thickens the limbs," she writes, "that consists the beauty of the nude; the surface of the skin for living color, and the articulate frame for expressiveness and living action are genuinely important, but not more so than the manifestation of life in the mere fact of station and erectness---a manifestation that is not perfect in clothing."<sup>2</sup> She admired the symmetry and proportion of the whole figure, but the contour of the limbs she thought most exquisite. "The leg," she said, "is the best part of the figure, inasmuch as it has the finest lines, and therewith those slender, diminishing forms which, coming at the base of the human structure, show it to be a thing of life by its unstable equilibrium. A lifeless structure is in stable equilibrium; the body, springing, poised,

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1. "The Royal Academy," Tablet, May 19, 1894.

2. Ibid.



upon its fine ankles and narrow feet, never stands without implying and expressing life. It is the leg that first suggested the fantasy of flight. We imagine wings to the figure that is erect upon the vital and tense legs of man; and the herald, Mercury, because of his station, looks new-lighted. All this is true of the best leg, and the best leg is the man's. That of the young child, in which the Italian schools of painting delighted, has neither movement nor supporting strength. In the case of the woman's figure it is the foot, with its extreme proportional smallness, that gives the precious instability, the spring and balance that are so organic."<sup>1</sup>

In such a picture as Tuke's August Blue, one could also see how the child was able to restore to the London landscape the color of life--that almost indefinable color that was "white, but less white than milk; brown but less brown than earth; red, but less red than dawn...lucid, but less lucid than the color of lilies...as delicately flushed as the paler wild roses, out to their utmost, flat as stars, in the hedges of the end of June."

The little figure of the London boy it is, that has restored to the landscape the human color of life. He is allowed to come out of all his ignominies, and to take the late color of the mid-summer north-west evening, on the borders of the Serpentine. At the stroke of eight he sheds the slough of nameless colors--all allied to the hues of dust, soot, and fog, which are the colors the world has chosen for its boys--and he makes, in his hundreds, a bright and delicate flush between the grey-blue water and the grey-blue sky. Clothed now with the sun, he is crowned by and by with twelve stars as he goes to bathe, and the reflection of an early moon is under his feet.

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1. "Unstable Equilibrium," The Rhythm of Life, pp. 26-27.
  2. "The Color of Life," p. 3.

And à propos the child, she says, "it is surely time that the child should be studied by a worthier art than that which has made the British baby a byword for so many years." For why, she asks, should the child, the freshest thing in the world, have been so long condemned to treatment by the stalest art and literature? "What can be done with this charming subject by art that is true to itself, convinced, sincere, diligent, and delicate in its methods," she declares, "may be seen by some achievements of French artists who have studied the young figure in its own lovely character, the movements of the unused limbs, the hair so blond and so fine that it is absorbed and effaced by the common gray daylight diffused upon the head of the nursing." But the modern ages, though more or less overlooking the possibilities of such a subject are yet, says Mrs. Meynell, vastly more aware of the charm of childhood than were the painters of the early and mediæval schools.

One of the most delightful of Mrs. Meynell's excursions into the art of the past is to be found in her Children of the Old Masters, a study of the child as it is depicted during five centuries of Italian art in the earlier paintings, in Tuscan sculpture and enamel, in the canvases of Florence, and in the work of the masters of Siena, Umbria, and the outlying schools, up to the time of Raphael and after. At the outset, she admits how seldom childlike is the Italian Old Masters' child, and the pictures discussed in her volume represent chiefly the exceptions. "Rarely and beautifully," she writes, "a purely infantile child--Bambino or angel--

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1. "The Grandfather in Charge," Art Journal, May, 1887, p. 147.

more rarely a little Virgin, and almost as rarely a portrait--shows how suddenly a master perceived the real character of childishness amid the conventions of his time and of his art. The Della Robbias, sometimes Botticelli, and Titian in one great example--these gave the childish look and the childish action of which they were aware, one hardly know how, seeing that both were before the eyes of other masters unperceived."<sup>1</sup>

Most frequently, the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries had a sentiment of their own for childhood, and one very unlike the modern attitude. "The children of the Italian masters for the greater part," writes Mrs. Meynell, "are such as the prejudice of the time would have them, graceful according to an adult ideal, fat and well-liking, and as beautiful as the hand could make them when the eye had not learned to condescend frankly to the conditions of their life whether in form or action. The Greeks had been most reluctant to recognize the true form--the proportion for instance, the relative size of the head and the relative length of the upper and lower limbs. The Italians confessed the characteristic form, but elung to their own banal idea of grace, the grace that carries the head aside, the grace of the dancing master; and imposing this upon the ultra-childish plumpness, the exaggerated infancy, the rolling limbs of their bimbi, they created a little corpulent artificial figure, not like a man, not like a child, the pet of the ages that brought mediæval Rome to the ground by the pickaxe, and set the seal of one style upon the city and the world."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Children of the Old Masters, p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 18.

It is from amid so many little boys wearing their make-believe childhood in the posture of indirect grace, that she has chosen the smaller number of authentic children. Among the most charming of these are the putti of Luca della Robbia in the bas relief for the singing-gallery of the Duomo at Florence. Here the artist uses his material gaily, and the children "move with impulse and energy in a youthful dance; in another panel they go clashing cymbals, six cymbals at once, used with a will."<sup>1</sup>

Among the Florentine painters, the children of Botticelli, that "re-animate Greek," at once come to mind. "His Christ-Child," says Mrs. Meynell,<sup>2</sup> could be more beautiful if Botticelli had not been obviously bound to the good gossiping parochial fifteenth-century idea of a fine child, a champion child. It must be what the French call plaisureux. To assign to this physique a conscious intelligence, to make of a full-fed boy, six months old, a kind of theologian, is to create a little figure of ambiguous aspect and manners."<sup>2</sup>

When another Florentine painter, Lorenzo Ghirlandajo, painted his stately Nativity of Mary for the church Santa Maria Novella, he decorated the chamber-room in the picture with a frieze of children at play. These children, says Mrs. Meynell, "are the putti of whom art, by that time had made an established convention, and of whom art, in time to come, was to make a continual commonplace. Something in these equivocal children, infantile and yet not infantile, graceful as the adult would have them,

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p. 32.

and corpulent as the gossip would have them so took the fancy of Italy as to make a rule and an example for centuries. Your Italian house-decorator today is fairly able to make you a design of putti, dolphins, and garlands after the manner of the fifteenth century. The child in question has become a kind of repeating pattern, and he owes his long life in art, through high times and decadent, to a love of the beauty of children that was an incomplete love, or, one might rather say, a love that filled completely the capacities of a somewhat shallow heart--like, d'aillours, some Italian music." Nevertheless, she says, it is to this painter that we owe one of the most direct and winning children of the time. "This," she says, "is the child who loves the bottle-nosed man in Ghirlandajo's beautiful picture, a charming child, exceedingly urgent yet gentle, with the little childish upper lip out, and the childish lower lip soft. The man loves him and is a sweet old man, as gentle as the boy, and the two profiles turn to each other, records of a tenderness certainly alive four hundred years ago."<sup>1</sup>

Among the Venetian painters, she found the children of Giovanni Bellini most unlike those of the Tuscan and the Roman schools. Bellini did not attempt to transcend nature, neither did he see it unless nor use force in interpreting it. "The Divine Child," says Mrs. Meynell, "is studied from the poor infant in the arms of the Venetian woman. She is made graver and more beautiful than life, arbitrarily beautifully, with her long features, long eyebrows, and full yet delicate cheeks; but the

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1. Ibid., p. 38.

child is made simply natural, and less beautiful than pathetic." In Bellini's picture of the Bambino asleep, she finds a charming but meagre figure of a young child with one arm dropped, and something sombre in the depth of his slumber. "Here," she says, "is no gusto arrondi, the grace is purely nature's, and it is lovely beyond the rivalry of artifices..... Bellini has not been afraid of a straight arm and a heavy head...Christ is tender, thin, and delicate in the designs of the Adriatic painters; never more sweet or more worn than in Giovanni Bellini's group. The figure is delicately treated; the little silken rings of curls are exquisitely drawn. And it is only when he paints an attendant angel that the master makes childhood flourish, clocks the hair, and creases the wrist."<sup>1</sup>

In one of Titian's paintings, too, she finds a delightful child in the human half of the little satyr or faun who goes in the train of Dionysius. "He is a satyr-urchin of the ways of the woods," writes Mrs. Keynall, "an enfant des rues of the forest and the shore of Naxos; he drags by a string the remnants and fragments of a sacrifice, as a child going on human feet pulls a toy horse after him, happy in knowing that it follows, as a backward glance now and then assures him. He does not laugh, but has a festal gravity as he skips that is perfectly childish. He is savage, simple, and idle, and has joined the rout of the progress of the god as a boy in London follows a show. The Venetian honesty and the Venetian freshness are manifest in this strolling, trolling figure of

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1. Ibid., p. 14.

Antiquity and the wild coast. The beauty of the head and the dark eyes is unmarred by any habitual form of prettiness. The sense of childhood is sincere. If a child--or but a half-child--is to bear a part in the journeys of wine-god, his Silenus, his nymphs, and his leopards, with clashing cymbals and outcries, this is the childish part--to drag something with a string. A Florentine would have made the little faun playing an instrument--he would have had, at least, to know something of the cymbals or the triangle. I think that Botticelli's amorini sporting with the arms and casque of the sleeping Mars show less feeling for child's play. Titian's faun is a child of sunshine, as is the beautiful god leaping from his car, embrowned with summer."<sup>1</sup>

One of the few girl-children in Italian art is to be found in Pintoretto's Presentation of the Virgin. Fortunately the artist has not taken occasion for a trivially beautiful or sentimental child. He has captured in his picture passion, movement, and "that splendor of the shadow-view in which he surpassed Titian."<sup>2</sup> Here the shadow-view is the luminous view, and the little figure going up the stair is directly against the sky and the cloud.

Italy, by her amiable example, says Mrs. Maynell, may be said to have sweetened and softened--perhaps too much--the children of the German, Flemish, and Dutch schools. "She civilized the nations of children, fed them high, put an end to all crying and forwardness, sleeked them, and

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1. Ibid., pp. 81-82.

2. Ibid., p. 84.

proclaimed a holiday in the nurseries of art." If, Mrs. Maynell writes in concluding the study, the pages of her book are varied by some disparagement of a certain number of putti who turn out their feet in a way that no living child ever did, at least no descendant exists to resent the criticism, for those children never grew up. "But the little boys of the Lalla Rookh, of Giovanni Bellini, of Tintoretto, mortals, ideally sweet," she avers, "have left their seed in 'sub-celestial' Italy, and the angels of Botticelli never died."



CHAPTER V

ALICE KEYNELL'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AS IT  
INFLUENCED HER PHILOSOPHY  
OF ART AND LITERATURE

"The literature of the man of letters worthy of the name," says Alice Keynell, "is rooted in all his qualities, with little fibres running invisibly into the smallest qualities he has."<sup>1</sup> Thus, in a much more subtle sense than the coiner of the phrase intended, she believed that style was the man. Her attitude was much like that of Milton who believed that if an author wished to write great poetry he must himself be a true poem. Since this was one of Alice Keynell's most seriously propounded convictions, and since it is true that great art brings the whole soul of man into activity, the reader who wishes to understand the full significance of her work must study not only her writings but also her philosophy of life as it influenced her theories of art and letters.

Obviously, the exterior circumstances of an author's life can never wholly explain his art. The achievements of Keats, for example, or of Shakespeare, defy the theories of those who attempt to find in environment the explanation of an author's genius. However, when we study an

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1. "Pocket Vocabularies," The Rhythm of Life, p. 43.

artist's philosophy of life, we are dealing with something far more personal, and something which, consciously or unconsciously, finds expression in his every action. A man may never formulate his philosophy of life in so many words, nor may he draw up for himself a formal code of action, yet, like every rational creature, he is governed by an individual attitude toward life which is implicit in his every voluntary action, and which dominates his every decision. This being true, a thorough study of an artist's work necessitates an understanding of the basic philosophy underlying his actions. Knowledge of such a philosophy, will not, of course, explain his art in its entirety, yet it is always helpful to perceive in their details the delicate workings of temperament and character. Such studies are valuable, especially if they are supplemented by other findings, because they give us a clue at least, which, when discovered, helps to make the complexity of an artist's life and work intelligible.

This is especially true of Alice Keynell. "Many authors," writes Katherine Brégy, "have written more nobly than they have lived; into their art has gone the truest part of the soul. But what unique conviction breathes from work which is at one with life--nay, which is the fruit of deep and costly living. The acuteness, the activity, the profundity of Mrs. Keynell's thought...have given to her work that peculiar intuition which is the rarest of beauties."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, her character and her com-

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1. Katherine Brégy, "Alice Keynell," Catholic World, Vol. 92, 1911, p. 494.

victions are evident in every detail of her writings. To live according to her own high standards meant unceasing vigilance, observation, and analysis, yet by no other means, she believed, could one attain to an art that was independent, original, and of perfect personal distinctness.

Perhaps her most outstanding characteristic was sincerity. She had no patience with the artist who tried to depict emotion that was fictitious or unrealized, "The songs of Innocence and Experience," she wrote, "are for each poet the songs of his own separate heart and life: but to take the cumulative experiences of other men, and to use these in place of the virginal fruit of thought--whereas one would hardly consent to take them for ordering even the most habitual of daily affairs--is to forego innocence and experience together."<sup>1</sup> It was her habit of bringing what the Impressionists called an innocent eye to the objects of everyday life which enabled her to present even the most commonplace things in the light of a fresh perception. "Whatever material or physical object she was contemplating," writes Squire, "was stripped of its conventional properties, examined anew, recorded with truth: she must see for herself and think for herself, and the results might be what they would. One effect of her independent and persistent habit of thought was that she was always making discoveries. She not only saw familiar objects in an unaccustomed light, but she perceived novel relations between them. The situations and arguments she presents are sometimes so unusual as to give the shock

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1. "Innocence and Experience," The Rhythms of Life, p. 57.

of oddity at first sight, but we soon become acclimatized to her truth."<sup>1</sup> This quality of truth, too, caused Chesterton to note "the terrible intensity with which she was in the habit of meaning things," and to remark her sensitive watchfulness which was, he said, "the fine edge of a fighting spirit."<sup>2</sup>

For Alice Maynell the last curiosity was not of art, but of life itself. "Mankind," she wrote, "lives by vital relations; and if these are real, so is the life, so is the art that expresses them, because it can express no more." The great mystery of human life was, for her, the disparity between man's destiny and his sometimes trivial nature. But even when his capacities were too limited to comprehend the full significance of his experiences, their greatness was not thereby lessened. "Life," says Mrs. Maynell, "is great that is trivially transmitted; love is great that is vulgarly experienced. Death, too, is a heroic virtue; and to the keeping of us all is death committed: death, submissive in the docile, modest in the fatuous, several in the vulgar, secret in the familiar....Unlikely people die. The one certain thing, it is also the one improbable. A dreadful paradox is perhaps wrought upon a little nature that is incapable of death and yet is constrained to die. That is a true destruction, and the thought of it is obscure."<sup>3</sup> But if these major experiences retained their dignity even when they were felt by those incapable of fully

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1. J.C. Squire, "Alice Maynell," The London Mercury, Jan. 1923, p. 285.

2. Chesterton, op. cit., p. 10.

3. "Domus Augusta," The Rhythm of Life, p. 70.

understanding them, they could raise the individual capable of grasping their full import to the heights of human experience. It was this conviction which led her, for example, to subscribe to Coventry Patmore's theory that love in its bestowal and reception "does but rehearse the action of the union of God with humanity." Moreover, she was continually preoccupied with the mystery of human personality--its essential separateness and even loneliness. Thus, in "A Poet's Wife" she likens the poet's kind to a tract of sea, which, though it is locked inland within the embrace of a field, yet meets the night alone, is spanned by tempests, and meets the sunrise face to face. In the second stanza she makes her application:

O Poet, more than ocean lonelier!  
In inaccessible rest  
And store remote, thou sea of thoughts, dost err  
Scattered through east and west,--  
Now, while thou closest with the kiss of her  
Who looks thee to her breast.<sup>1</sup>

A similar concept of the essential singleness of the human soul is revealed in her discussion of the letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Robert Browning:

Nine readers of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's letters, with the history they tell of the life of two poets, will admire the perfect union in that marriage of true minds. But the truth will discover that the marriage of true minds was an act of abstinence from the vain attempt at what the inveterate sentiment of man calls union. The ideal of union is surely ready-made and rash; it seems to be one of the things persistently hoped for by the sentimental--things appearing and reappearing among the vaguer aspirations of man, and called sacred although they have not the sacred sanctions of experience. The two who were so well married seem to have been mated rather by a near companionship of two solitudes. It is usual to think that solitude is one; so that two solitudes are not believed to be two when they

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1. "A Poet's Wife," The Poems of Alice Meynell, p. 79.

are within sight and sound of one another; and because they are not distant they are thought to be not separate. But love is not confusion, and the very word 'together' is a sign of the distinctness that is never to be overcome.<sup>1</sup>

A great deal has been written about Mrs. Keynall's asceticism, yet there is another and more liberal side to her character, which has not received a great deal of notice, probably because the essays in which these views are expressed have not found their way into the volumes of her collected works. In her essay on "The Human Instincts, Their Lapse and Their Survival," for example, she declares that civilization has tended to thwart the development of some of man's most important faculties. "Man," she declares, "is not what he might be. Sedulous attention, guided by reason and experience, and directed to the perfection of the physical faculties, of the senses, and of the instincts, and going side by side with what we understand by education, might have produced at this stage of the history of the race a being of brilliant, subtle, and complicated powers, the resources of whose position in the creation would be all but infinite. Man has, however, deliberately consented not only to neglect that development of his instincts which the guidance and direction of reason might have produced, but to renounce them even as they stood in their undeveloped or spontaneous state--the state in which the animals possess them. The conscious faculties have been developed at the expense of those which are instinctive or unconscious."<sup>2</sup>

True, the instincts of man are not altogether lost, but such as sur-

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1. "Marriage of True Minds," Pall Mall Gazette, November 10, 1887.
  2. "Human Instincts, Their Lapse and Their Survival," Merry England, December, 1884, p. 108.

rive, are weakened in the race, and still more weakened in the adult individual. And if civilization has done service to some particular departments of the intellect, yet the loss, Mrs. Meynell asserts, has outweighed the gain. "It is not easy to make a mental picture of man as he might have been," she declares, "with all the instincts which are useful to the perfection of character not only preserved but developed; with all the instincts which are not generally necessary divided and relegated to the classes in which they are useful; and last but not least, with the animal faculties as distinct from the passions not totally neglected as we find them now in civilized society, but so cultivated and refined upon that his scent might be as subtle as that of the hound, his hearing as keen as the Indian's, his sight as long as the vulture's. These would be a wonderful combination of physical cultivation with aesthetic."<sup>1</sup>

For, she says, the ear which now is trained to take extreme delight in the harmonies of Schumann would also be able to hear the subtle changes in the wind; the eye, so highly educated in the beauties of line that the figure of an Etruscan urn gives it a feast of delight, would also be able to see the color of a flag at the mast of a ship on the far-distant horizon. But even subtler powers might be developed in man. "At the same time," she asserts, "faculties quite distinct from the five senses which we know, faculties which there is reason to believe are known to the aborigines of Australia, might be reawakened in the modern physique. Some of these people declare themselves to be aware, by means of a throbbing, of the flesh of the approach of men, of the direction of an arrow, and of

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1. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

other things not within sight or hearing. And it might be a curious matter of speculation how the developments of civilization could be brought to bear upon this possible sixth sense. It might in time receive an aesthetic perfection such as sight and hearing have received, and be, in unimagined ways, a source of human pleasure now inconceivable."<sup>1</sup>

But of all the senses, the one which is most neglected by modern man, according to Mrs. Meynell, is the delicate sense of touch. Few, unless they are players of some instrument, use the extreme tips of their fingers at all. "Of all the senses which make no general progress in the history of man," she declares, "touch is surely the one that loses. It is a sense that sleeps in idle hands, whereas vision has this advantage: that in perpetual practice all the time that the idlest eyes are open. Sight can never greatly lapse, but touch is not now what it was in the bronze age, for instance, except in those who train it for special and expert uses."<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the hand that is exquisitely sensitive has more to endure from surfaces that are hostile to all its nerves, but it is also able to enjoy the touch of welcome textures--"the strength, spring, and freshness of linen, the various qualities of good paper, the quality of ivory, the sharpness of fine carving." Form, likewise, she declares, is not for the eyes only, and there should be recognition by touch of the Attic shape. Texture is often not perceptible in any other manner, and beauty that the eye cannot see is kept for the touch. "The eyes that dwell upon a child's

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1. Ibid., p. 117.

2. "Surfaces," Pall Mall Gazette, November 25, 1896.



cheek," she writes, "must refer in their turn to an imagined touch. Nothing, but a caress can prove the exceeding softness of the cheek, nothing but touch can prove its warmth, its freshness, or the human temperature, the climate of life with all its delicate degrees."<sup>1</sup>

All the senses and all the instincts, she asserts, are good: "Life would be better worth living for a greater perfection in our neglected senses, and would be more single, straight, tender, and heroic for the better preservation of our neglected instincts."<sup>2</sup>

Here, certainly was none of the distrust of the physical which characterized the philosophy of the medieval ascetic who looked upon the body and its properties as the enemy of his soul's salvation. Mrs. Maynell looked upon it as an instrument, delicate, sensitive, capable of bringing to man the most exquisite of experiences. Nowhere is this better expressed than in her poem, "To the Body:"

Thou inmost, ultimate  
Council of judgment, palace of decrees,  
Where the high senses hold their spiritual state  
Sued by earth's embassies,  
and sigh, approve, accept, conceive, create;

Create--thy senses close  
With the world's pleas. The random odours reach  
Their sweetness in the place of thy repose,  
Upon thy tongue the peach,  
and in thy nostrils breathes the breathing rose.

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1. Ibid.

2. "Human Instincts; Their Lapse and Their Survival," op. cit.

To thee, secluded one,  
The dark vibrations of the sightless skies,  
The lovely, inexplicit colors run;  
The light gropes for those eyes.  
O thou august! thou dost command the sun.

Music, all dumb, hath trod  
Into thine ear her one effectual way;  
And fire and cold approach to pain thy nod,  
Where thou call'st up the day,<sup>1</sup>  
Where thou awaitest the appeal of God.

Nor were such theories incompatible with her philosophy of rejection. "The only legitimate abstention," she declared, "is from a quality at command,"<sup>2</sup> and her rejection was that of an artist who, from among many details, must select those which are most suitable to his purpose. Thus, her exquisitely developed senses were always under the guidance of the controlling mind. "Her controlling intellect," says Garvin, "steered the hyper-sensitive nerves...and though there was something elemental in her manner as in her writing, she seemed thrice refined."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, she desired not only to write, but to live, beautifully. What she wrote of her father might be said with equal truth of her: the things she abstained from were all exquisite, for what was ignoble never approached near enough for her refusal. "Where others bluster along, purblind with haste or desire," writes Nevins, "she, having won an increased refinement of spirit by devoted abstinence, can perceive a fugitive and unrecorded beauty in the open secrets of every day."<sup>4</sup>

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1. "To the Body," The Poems of Alice Meynell, p. 89.

2. "A Group of Poets," Merry England, June, 1898, p. 136.

3. J.L. Garvin, "Alice Meynell," The Living Age, Vol. XXIX, p. 103.

4. Henry W. Nevins, "Mrs. Meynell," The Critic October, 1903, p. 346.

"I could wish abstention," says Mrs. Meynell, "to exist and even to be evident in my words. In literature as in all else man merits his subjection to trivialities by a kind of economical greed."<sup>1</sup> And in another essay she formulated her doctrine of rejection. "We can conceive an antique world," she writes, "in which life, art, and letters were simple because of the absence of many things; for us now they can be simple only because of our rejection of many things...Our rejection must be alert and expert to overtake exaggeration and arrest it...and indeed the whole endless action of refusal shortens the life we could desire to live. Much of our resolution is used up in the repeated mental action of adverse decision...in the very touch of joy there hides I know not what ultimate denial; if not on one side, on the other. If joy is given to us without reserve, not so do we give ourselves to joy. We withhold, we close. Having denied many things that have approached us, we deny ourselves to many things. Thus does il gran rifiuto divide and rule our world."<sup>2</sup>

In an article in Kerry England she declares that in the modern world this doctrine of rejection alone can preserve the dignity, the subtlety, the vitality of English letters. After decriing the excesses of so much modern writing in which the fine aroma of phrases has evaporated in a constant wind of words, so that the author must have recourse to the stronger flavors at the risk, sooner or later, of destroying these also, she assures the reader that the freshness and charm of English letters might still be preserved if he would make and keep these rules: "to read nothing that is

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1. "The Flower," The Rhythm of Life, p. 24.  
 2. "Rejection," The Rhythm of Life, pp. 80-81.

literarily vile or unworthy; never to endanger his own freshness by any author's stale and rank style; to renew his youth every morning among the young writers of a young world, whose vivid suggestions he will vividly assimilate; to keep simple feelings, and, to this end, not to read overmuch; to shun as little instruments of murder the pens which are so feebly yet so numerous prickling a language to death."<sup>1</sup> This, says Mrs. Maynell, would be a true asceticism of the mind, because much that is not altogether unworthy of pleasure and leisure would be lost by it, but, she assures us, "such abstinence would be overpaid, not merely by the happy consequences to feeling and taste, but by that disproportionate reward given to all self-denial--the keeping open of one secure place of sweetness and sanity to the heart, a retreat of surrendered and abnegated wishes."<sup>2</sup>

For rejection, Mrs. Maynell declares, has its pleasures, the more secret the more unmeasured. And rejection is the price one must pay for refinement, a quality which is not to be achieved but by the refusal of many ostensibly worthy things. "One who suggests to me that refinement is apt to be a mere negative," she writes, "has offered up a singular blunder in honor of robustness. Refinement is not negative because it must be compassed by many negatives. It is a thing of price as well as of value; it demands immolations, it demands experience."<sup>3</sup> And on those who have knowledge of these things is laid the greater obligation--not less oblige. "No slight or easy charge," she says, "is committed to such of us as,

1. "Reviews and Views," Merry England, July, 1890, p. 245.

2. Ibid.

3. "Rejection," ibid., p. 82.

having apprehension of these things, fulfil the office of exclusion. Never before was a time when derogation was always so near, a daily danger, or when the reward of resisting it was so great. The simplicity of literature, more sensitive, more threatened, and more important than other simplicities, needs a guard of honor, who shall never relax the good will nor lose the good heart of their intolerance."<sup>1</sup>

In life, as in art and literature, she derided the habitual. "Who," she asked, "has ever multiplied or repeated his delights? Or who has ever claimed the granting of the most foolish of his wishes--the prayer for reiteration? It is a curious slight to generous Fate that man should, like a child, ask for one thing many times. Her answer every time is a resembling but new and single gift; until the day when she shall make the one tremendous difference among her gifts--and make it perhaps in secret--by naming one of them the ultimate. What, for novelty, what, for singleness, what, for separateness, can equal the last? Of many thousand kisses the poor last--but even the kisses of your youth are all numbered."<sup>2</sup>

But if Mrs. Meynell distrusted the tyranny of habit, which, if unchecked, would sap the vitality of life and reduce it to monotony, she distrusted even more the narrowness and intolerance which constituted what she called the provincialism of the intellect. The provincial, she says, lacks the divine quality of impartiality. "And who," she asks, "does not know the mental provincialism which is built up within the very center of the center--the hobbies which are ridges, the obstinacies which are in-

1. Ibid.

2. "The Flower," op. cit., p. 25.

sisted upon, the points which are pressed in the most august assembly in the world?"<sup>1</sup> Very few people, she declares, are able to attain to a Shakespearean impartiality and tolerance, and the true provincial is one who whispers, "Have a conviction and insist upon it." "A separation from the many, a herding within the little village of the intellect with those who share the cherished opinion, whatever it may be"--this she says, is a kind of provincialism which triumphs over space and time and immeasurably narrows the range of the arts.

But if she discredited provincialism of the intellect she had profound sympathy for the "domus angusta," the small human nature compelled to a large human destiny, "charged with a fate too great, a history too various, for its slight capacities." The larger nature is explicit, and is clamorous of its disappointments and desires, but "the narrow house has no echoes; yet its pathetic shortcomings might well move our pity. On that strait stage is acted a generous tragedy; to that inadequate soul is entrusted an enormous sorrow; a tempest of movement makes its home within that slender nature; and heroic happiness seeks that timorous heart."<sup>2</sup>

We may, says Mrs. Maynell, know the narrow house by its inarticulateness--not so much by its fewness of words as by its inadequacy and imprecision of speech. "For, doubtless," she says, "right language enlarges the soul as no other power or influence may do. Who, for instance, but trusts more nobly for knowing the full word of his confidence? Who but loves more penetratingly for possessing the ultimate syllable of his tenderness?....

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1. "Eclogues of a Provincial Life," Merry England, October, 1883, p. 406.  
 2. "Domus Angusta," The Rhythms of Life, p. 75.

And I suppose that even physical pain takes on an edge when it not only enforces a pang but whispers a phrase."

Yet there was nothing in life, she maintained, that was essentially mean or commonplace if one had courage to go intimately near it. "Held just at arm's length," she asserted, "familiar things are merely common; treated from a distance they are merely picturesque; but touched so closely that the taking of the breath and the beating of the heart become sensible, they are so beautiful that a great artist may give them a divine significance."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the fire of humanity burned always under the firm surface of Mrs. Maynell's prose, for a contemplation of the large processes of life and the mysteries of eternity was habitual to her. Garvin described her well when he called her a spiritual romantic disguised by classical forms. She schooled herself to reticences of expression, but beneath all her work there beat the impassioned heart. "Each of her short pieces," says Garvin, "contained a part of the sense distilled from a deliberate and vigilant life; you cannot apprehend a year of hers by a moment of your own."<sup>2</sup> Yet she kept her simplicity, a quality which she regarded as the final step in art, and one which, though in theory it belonged to youth, had to be acquired slowly like other attributes of the maturer innocence. "Simplicity--to be true to oneself, to be emancipated and impulsive and characteristic--this is not the first step in art but the last, and he who attains it is a master."<sup>3</sup> Indeed it would be difficult to find a more adequate description of the

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1. "The Nativity in Art," Art Journal, December, 1890, p. 360.

2. J.L. Garvin, op. cit.,

3. "Leon Bonnat," Magazine of Art, Vol. IV, p. 238.

the work of Alice Maynell poet, connoisseur, and critic, than her own praise of the simplicity of great art---"it vouches for the beauty it transcends; it answers for the riches it forbears; and it implies the art which it fulfills."



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